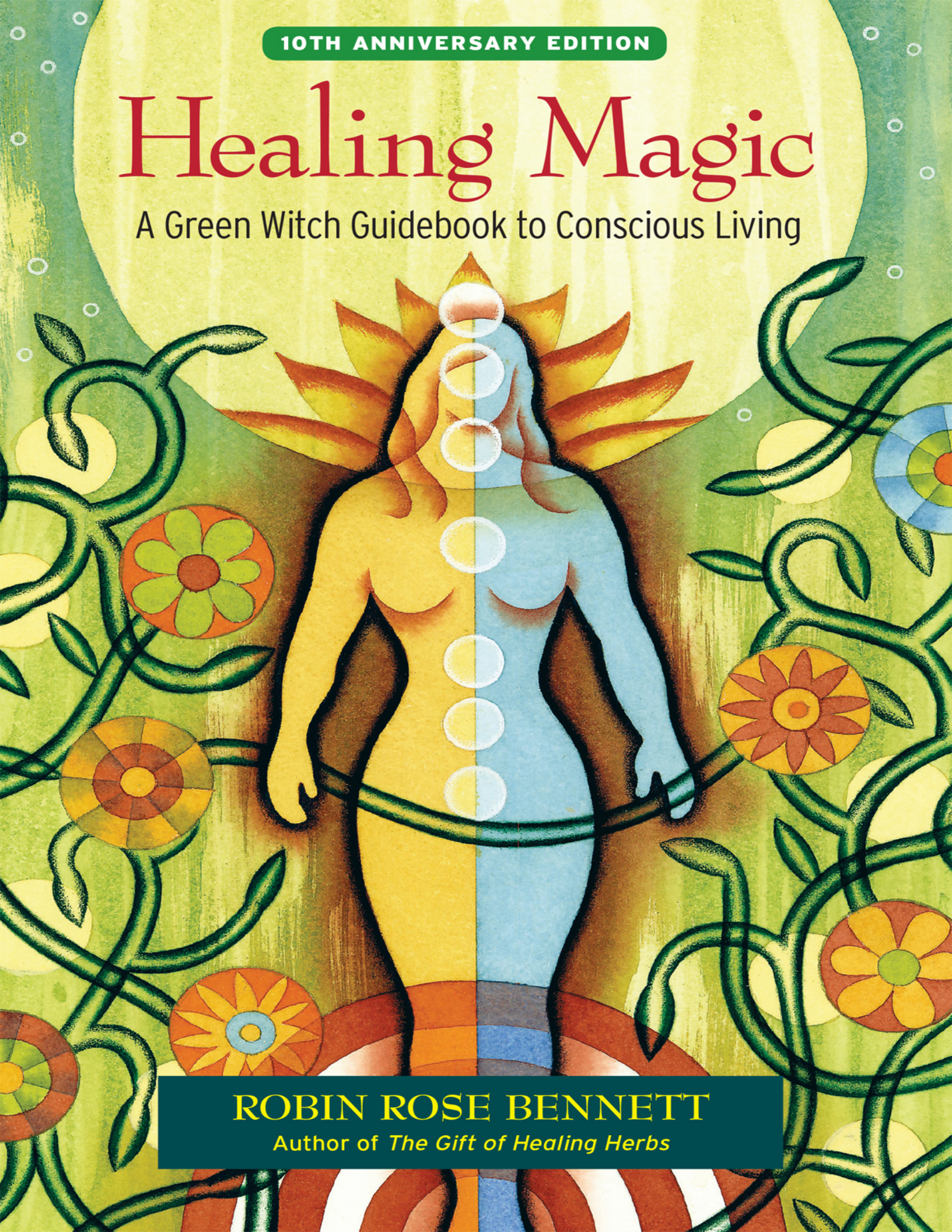
10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Healing Magic

A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living



ROBIN ROSE BENNETT

Author of *The Gift of Healing Herbs*

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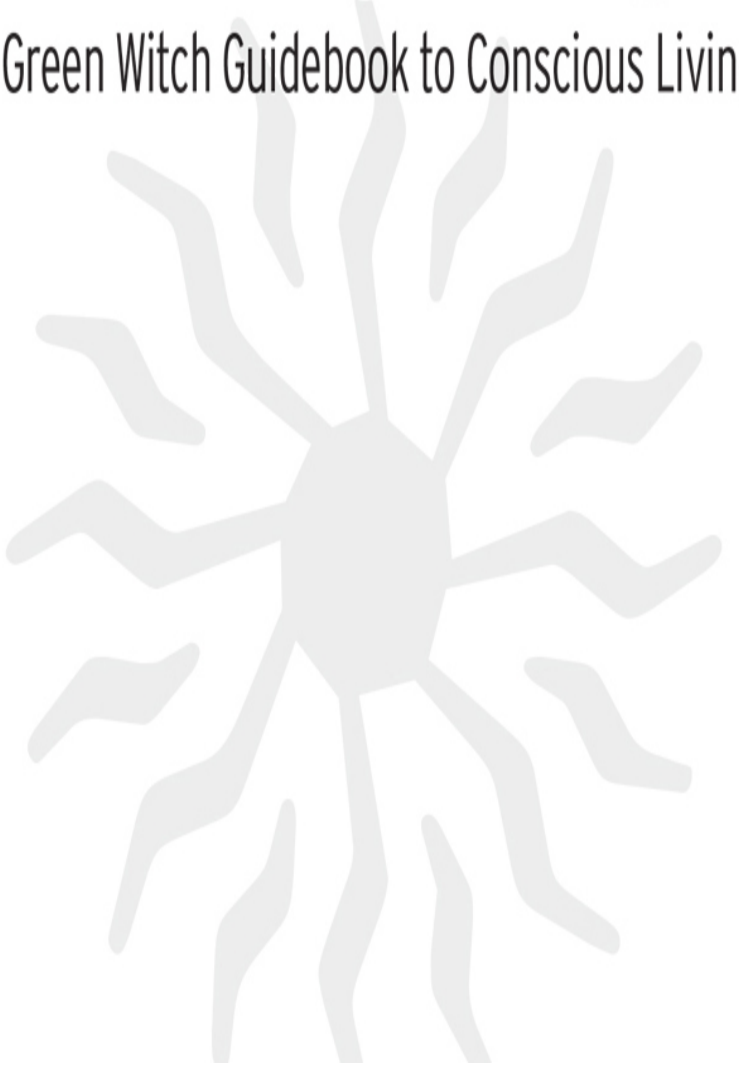

ROBIN ROSE BENNETT

Foreword by Susun S. Weed

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All names used in the stories in this book are real unless otherwise noted. All songs, poems, circle-casting invocations, meditations, and spells were written by the author except where otherwise noted. Every effort has been made to give proper credit wherever it was due.

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Peace and justice,

Truth and joy,

Are the birthright

Of every girl and boy.

Wake up,

Speak out,

And, yes, even sing,

Of the love that is in every living thing–

And then throughout the world, let freedom ring.

To Mama Earth

And all your children,

All my relations,

A give-away to you.

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FOREWORD

Are you curious about magic? Intrigued by herbal lore? Do you feel a connection to the earth? To the moon? Do you have prophetic dreams? See stories in a crystal or cards? Do you want to be more in charge of your own health care? And emotional needs? Do you want to celebrate life? To learn the women's mystery stories? Are you wondering about the Wise Woman Tradition? Eager to learn more about Medicine Wheels? Interested in chakras and energy healing? Intrigued by magical ceremonies? Then you have come to the right place. You have opened a book that will enchant you and teach you and guide you and nourish you deeply and fully.

My friend, Wise Woman and sister Green Witch Robin Rose, has gifted us all with a book that is partly a how- to manual for the aspiring Green Witch, partly a do-it-yourself shamanic journey, partly a book of lights and shadows, partly a compendium of herbal lore, partly a telling of stories—and wholly loving, compassionate, inclusive, and fun. She helps us wake up our senses and get intimate with the plant and animal life that thrive wherever we are, in city or country.

For this she may perhaps best be known: That after her apprenticeship with me she returned to Manhattan, where she lived for another ten years, nourishing herself with herbal infusions, "a weed a day" from the parks of the City, and magical ceremonies alone and with others. Of course, she alleviated some chronic problems in the process. That's Healing Magic.

Healing Magic isn't exotic or far away or costly or rare. Healing Magic is the art of allowing the magic in, no matter where you find yourself. It is the following of the cycles of the sun and the moon and the earth with intention and wisdom. It is the daily experience of using natural objects, of herbs as foods, of simple ceremony. It is the reawakening of the senses we had as children, a return to the ground of human beingness, a reconnection with the earth, a gladness that touches the heart.

Of course, this is easier said than done—and thus this book: A training manual, shall we say, for those who wish to evoke Healing Magic every day. A training manual for those who would walk in beauty on the Mother Earth—with color, with song, with herbal medicine and magic, with breath, with attention, with magic, with mystery. Read these stories. Do these exercises. Your life will change—for the better.

Healing Magic is the magic of the Wise Woman Way. It is the magic of the soup pot. It is the magic of the teacup. It is the magic of a candle. It is the magic of a story. It is the invisible magic. The mysterious movement of life. Breath and heartbeat, birth and death. The women's mystery stories that reveal the powers of menstruation, the secrets of fertility, and the wisdom of menopause. The ever-changing moon who changes in us, the Wise Women. Healing Magic is centered in the heart, beating with the heartbeat of the earth.

Healing Magic is the magic of the "barefoot doctor." Chinese "barefoot doctors" traveled the countryside barefoot, helping and healing using simple herbs, not difficult-to-do practices or hard-to-get remedies. Similarly, *Healing Magic: A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living* offers us simple, safe ways of using common herbs for emotional and physical health and healing. It urges us to appreciate weeds instead of pills, a gentle touch instead of an injection, intuition instead of X-rays. (And if we must take pills or receive injections or submit to X-rays, then *Healing Magic: A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living* tells us how to connect with the Healing Magic in those things, too.)

Healing Magic is like the magic of Tantric yoga. It invites us to honor and delight in our sacred senses, to trust our intuition, to value beauty and grace, to become thoroughly intimate with nature in all her aspects. It offers us specific ways to feel the flowing love of the Universe in every cell of our being. It encourages us to open ourselves to the wonder and play of the world. It reminds us that pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional.

Healing Magic: A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living is a garden of delights. Wander here as you will, picking fruit, smelling the flowers, delighting in the bees and butterflies, tasting the delicious greens, and savoring the fresh air and bubbling spring water. It is a journey you will want to make again and again, as each trip will bring new stories, new sights, new sensations to you. And each visit between its covers will help you reweave

yourself more deeply into the healing cloak of the Ancients, will help you sit ever more firmly in the lap of the Wise Women who were your ancestors.

Healing Magic: A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living is filled with green blessings. Don't wait! Help yourself to a large serving.

—SUSUN S. WEED

author of the *Wise Woman Herbal Series*

INTRODUCTION TO THE 2004 EDITION

Remember how thrilling everything is when you're freshly in love? Healing Magic is like that, and more.

It is experienced by reconnecting with the earth, by falling in love with life itself.

Healing Magic is present and available in any and every moment, so where do you begin?

It began for me one afternoon when I was twelve years old. I was standing outside on a suburban street, talking with two of my best girlfriends after walking home from school. We stood close together, forming a natural circle as we talked and laughed and shared secrets. I told them mine. "I am a witch!" I said, both nervously and proudly.

"How do you know? What is a witch? Are you a good witch or a bad witch?" They questioned me with great excitement.

I knew, but I'm not sure how. Nor am I sure what I said in answer to their questions. It must have sounded good, though, because they decided they were witches, too. We declared we would practice magic and develop our psychic skills, because that's what witches do.

We didn't know any real books on the subject, and, of course, the Internet didn't exist yet. We also decided we had to have a special phrase or password to identify ourselves (as well as any other witches we might discover). Witches know many secrets and have lots of fun, so we made our password a quietly mysterious, behind-the-hand, witchy laugh that sounded like, "tee-hee-hee." That was thirty-three years ago, and I think we had it about right.

Learning and using Healing Magic is a moment-to-moment process that can be guided and directed by your conscious intent. It is a natural process of coming home to yourself by awakening all your senses. You are thus cultivating your own spiritual awakening, nourishing your own freedom.

You don't have to be a Green Witch to experience Healing Magic, but if you don't believe in magic, your life won't be magical.

Magic is an *extraordinary* reality that interpenetrates all of what we call everyday reality. It is often most richly experienced when you are taking delight in what is simple: hearing a child's laughter, singing a favorite song, kissing, or holding hands with someone you love.

Healing Magic is for everyone.

Practicing magic is the art of guiding energy toward a desired outcome for yourself, someone else, or your community through the focusing of intent and the creative power of your conscious imagination.

As practiced by Green Witches, magic is natural and ethical, honoring free will and the ultimate wisdom of the Universe (universal self).

Healing Magic is practiced in co-creation with nature by consciously learning to weave with nature's threads—the exquisite, synchronistic energy threads that connect all aspects of life multidimensionally.

Healing Magic is not about tricks or illusions, or delusions of trying to control everything. Healing Magic is authentic. It is a way of being in the world that grows out of relating to the web of life, which in turn affects how you perceive and experience reality. It nourishes your desire to use your creative gifts and honor your responsibilities as a human being on the earth. *Healing Magic: A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living* helps you learn to use your creative power wisely.

Healing Magic brings you home to yourself, to your own rhythms and timing. It guides you to dream and helps bring your dreams into being.

With Healing Magic, your life becomes more magical. Wondrous, synchronous events manifest with increasing regularity. You have more fun. Healing Magic opens your heart and brings you more vitality and freedom.

Thirty-three years later, I can see that speaking my truth to my girlfriends was an act of discovery and an initiation into claiming my own power, my own gifts. Even then, I had an intuitive knowing, a psychic awareness, and a conscious gleaning of the magical interconnectedness of all life, of how Healing Magic intertwines throughout the seemingly everyday world. I have

been walking that path of awakening all of my life, and many helpful stories from my journey will be found within the pages of this guidebook.

Healing Magic is real, and it is accessible to anyone.

This book is filled with simple yet profound practices that are appropriate for spiritual beginners and also for experienced witches and other spiritual practitioners. These practices can help you experience Healing Magic, or deepen your experience of it in your daily life. Walking the path of Healing Magic together, we will inevitably bring more peace and justice, more joy and laughter, more deep nourishment and delight back into the world.

Welcome into the Circle.

Blessed Be.

—ROBIN ROSE BENNETT

INTRODUCTION TO THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

As I write this new introduction to *Healing Magic: A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living*, I want to speak clearly and unabashedly from my heart. I seek to find the magic words that will help you dive in and explore what is calling you, to realize or affirm what you already know within yourself—that there is nothing more healing and empowering than deepening the experience of your connection with Nature.

To reunite your heart and mind with Mother Earth and all of Nature is to awaken to your own true nature, your own true self. It unites your body, mind, heart, and soul. This is the Earth path calling you home; it is a magical, healing path to becoming fully alive and truly human.

We are alive in a perilous and precious time—a time of enormous change, growing consciousness, and nearly unimaginable opportunities to dream a new dream for our Earth and actually bring that healing dream into being. This is a time of death and dying, and a time of creative rebirth. Each of us is being offered the opportunity to become a conscious partner in the process of accelerated evolution in our personal lives and in the larger world.

Healing Magic begins by connecting with the Earth, because this is the fundamental connection that human beings are meant to have—the solid base from which you can confidently build your individual life, fulfilling yourself according to your unique desires, talents, and abilities. Connecting with the wild heart of the Earth, with the complexity and generosity of her intrinsic nature as well as the vastness of her living being, is akin to connecting with your own essence and your own heart—but on a much larger scale. It reveals the great power and promise of your own creative gifts, even as it brings an inevitable, growing awareness of your connection with all the other beings of the planet.

Healing Magic: A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living has more to it than may at first meet the eye. You can read it on a number of levels, in the

way that you can read a myth or a magical "children's" story over and over again. When the myth or story is revisited, new messages and meanings are found. As one reader wrote, "The first time I read your book I thought it was truthful and lovely, and very sweet. I enjoyed it, then put it aside. A few years later, a series of experiences brought me to the brink of despair. I felt suicidal and prayed for guidance, and received a clear, intuitive message to get your book from my bookshelf and re-read it. I was stunned at the depth I found there. I hadn't seen it before. It saved my life."

On a less dramatic note, another reader wrote, "Each time I open it, something new speaks to me. It is a perfect reminder that being down to earth is entirely magical." She added, "Many people have forgotten their vital connection to the earth, which causes both people and the earth to suffer. In 'Reconnecting with the Earth' and other sections of the book, you provide simple and tangible practices to help people develop and recall a personal relationship with the living Earth, and awaken their intuition. This is tremendously healing and empowering. It is through building genuine relationship with the earth that we will take good care of her as with any loved one."

The earth contains your consciousness in every drop of water, in every tree, stone, and grain of sand. Without a personal sense of your body- and soul-connection to Earth, you will always feel like something is missing—because it is! You are meant to be in intimate relationship with trees, plants and animals. You are part of the pulsating life force of our planet that's abuzz in the rhythmic dances of pollinators and plants, salmon and river currents, ocean floors that rise up over eons to become new mountaintops, and moon cycles that guide the ceaseless ebb and flow of the tides. All these and so much more are expressions of nature's exuberant, endless creativity and ever-evolving complexity. We are all one, in infinite forms.

My way of teaching you how to reconnect with the Earth—more precisely, how *to feel your connection*—is through simple practices that even a child can do. This connection you are "creating" is not actually new. What you are doing is taking the time to allow yourself to perceive and feel the connection that is already here. As an herbalist, a lover of the healing flowers, plants, and trees, of course I have included a chapter ("Herbal Magic") on specifically working with herbs to help you rekindle your sense of connectedness with Mother Earth. I have especially, but not exclusively, focused on herbs that help awaken

your intuition and deepen your ability to listen to the ways in which nature is seeking to communicate with you. You can learn to get very quiet and listen with your body and your heart.

But, how do you get "out of your mind" and into your heart? How do you move from the excluding mind to the inclusive heart, from defending "me" and hoarding what is "mine" to protecting "us" and caring about what is all of ours? How do you detach from small-minded thinking that what matters most in life is "my job," "my house," "my car," "my pension," and "my status"? How do you move into an expansive, heart-centered knowing that what truly matters in life is for everyone: nourishing food, clean water, breathable air, fulfilling work, opportunities for creative expression, fertile land, healthy citizens, respect for the rights of all species, joyful children, good relations, and genuine freedom and justice for all? How do you heal your sense of being disconnected from nature and others, and move into a place of integration and synthesis? How can you bring your healing into compassionate action on behalf of our world?

You need to learn to stop trying to control life. You'll never succeed at that anyway, and life flows much better when you're willing to stand in awe of the majesty and mystery of the revolving cycles of birth and death, day and night, growth and decay. You are rewarded for this return to "beginner's mind" (as they say in Zen Buddhism) by increased joy and delight in daily living. It is like returning to a child's sensibility, but with an adult's empowered awareness that invites you to focus your creative gifts wherever and however you choose. In other words, releasing control and engaging mystery leads to the empowerment that helps you achieve your dreams.

In the chapter "Engaging Mystery," I offer simple practices and personal healing rituals for you to do, or to use as examples to encourage you to make up your own. Some can be done once, while others are to be done regularly. These practices, meditations and rituals help shift your awareness. By using them this way, you are guiding your own healing at your own pace; you are traveling along the natural current your inner being wants to flow with; you are growing in ways you are innately designed to grow, in order to become who you came here to be—your absolutely unique and invaluable self.

Women have been largely excluded from being considered "important," either as spiritual guides or in the running of the world and the distribution of the world's resources. This has been going on for such a long time now that

it has become accepted in many if not most parts of the world that women are "lesser" than men, and that they are somehow "wrong." Girls and women (and the men in their lives) have internalized this message over many generations. But women, and females of nearly all species, are the mothers who carry, nourish, and give birth through their bodies, and therefore tend to look at life in generous, relational terms. Women are being called to lead, to be at the forefront in this chapter of our species' evolution. It is imperative that women heal these old misperceptions, and claim our unique gifts, our special ways of doing things. So there is a chapter ("Moon Magic and Women's Wisdom") on healing for women, offering practices for re-integrating women's particular intuitive ways of wisdom and magic for the benefit of all beings. Men, too, need to heal their relationship with the "divine feminine" energy, with the women in their lives, and with Mother Earth—so there is medicine here for everyone.

I feel the essential teachings contained within *Healing Magic* are even more important now, more necessary for our personal and planetary healing, than when it was first written. Many of the teachings contained here reflect universal truths common to innumerable wisdom traditions, but it is also a guidebook, a Green Witch's "how-to" book.

Healing Magic: A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living takes you onto a deeply felt path of magical living, of being ever more fully engaged in your life —with your body, with Nature, with whatever brings you joy and pleasure. It helps you reveal to yourself that you are a soul living in a body on the earth, fully engaged with the material world yet continuously nourished by the natural forces that underlie the world of appearances we have labeled "the real world". There is a "realer" world than that one, and the practices and meditations in this guidebook can help you open to your own direct experience of the elemental nature of reality and the ancient forces that shape your world every moment. These elemental forces are much, much stronger than the social, corporate forces that seem so intractably to rule our world. These larger, primal forces ultimately have the strongest say in what happens to life on Earth. And these elemental forces are talking louder now than when I first wrote this book.

These primal forces, too, are part of who you are, and you can learn to be in good relationship with the air, fire, water and earth. You are made up of the same "stuff" as the universe. You *are* the universe. The chapter on the elements

called "The Medicine Wheel of Magic" introduces you to ways of interacting with the elements and drawing upon them in your life. These elements are recognized and acknowledged with respect on every continent on Mother Earth by people who live with the awareness that they are an integral part of nature. The greatest illusion is that we are separate from nature and one another, or that anyone or anything is above nature—which is the ultimate expression of ignorance combined with a dangerous dose of arrogance.

These elements are engaged in the chapters on spells and rituals. Spells—or, as I like to say, "spelling out what you want" to the Universe—are a magical way to focus your intention and energy on a desired outcome. They can be fun, or they can be serious. They can be about important issues, or trivial ones. It is up to you how you choose to use your magic. I rarely do spells anymore, as I am most interested in working with my life as it unfolds, finding the meaning in what is, rather than using magic to get a result that I imagine will make me happier or more secure or what-have-you. However, having said that, practicing spell work can be both empowering and enlightening, and I don't discourage it. I simply try to put in appropriate guidance and warnings regarding the foolishness of attempting to manipulate life, and the harm of attempting to manipulate anyone else. As I write in the chapter on "Spells," you are a co-creative artist of your life. Crafting a spell is "good practice for consciously collaborating with the Universe in creating your everyday life too."

Ritual, especially community ritual, is part of just about everyone's life. It is essential for empowering community actions and healing. Ritual, at best, is "participatory theater of the real" and empowers the participants as it deepens our relationships with nature, the elements, and one another. We need rituals to mark rites of passage, to celebrate joys, and mourn losses, together. Rituals help a community bond in ordinary and extraordinary times. Magical healing rituals will include the entire community in their embrace—including the trees, plants, rivers, and so forth.

Ritual is not only a magical way of marking major events and celebrating natural cycles, but a way of affecting how things come into being—a way of working with your creative energies to literally co-create new realities. There is enormous potential not only for healing, but also for achieving tangible results in these kinds of rituals, as you will read in the stories shared in this chapter.

To distill the key messages in *Healing Magic: A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living* down to their essence: The world is rich in magic and mystery that is available to any of us when we open our minds and hearts. Simple practices and personal rituals are offered that help you open your heart and mind, and feel your body as part of nature. The simple practices throughout the book are designed to lead you to your own direct experiences of interconnection, and to experience the absolute aliveness of Nature. Community rituals do this as well, and bring people together to share who we are on deeper levels. Even a ritual as simple as making and eating a meal with friends can fulfill our natural desire for loving connection and nourishment.

As you open yourself to this kind of magical worldview, which some might call a spiritual or an indigenous worldview, you feel for yourself—and thus know experientially—that everything is inextricably interrelated and interdependent. You begin to heal your own life, and will experience far more joy and pleasure in your daily life than before. This energizes you and your relationships with others, and helps you to focus your passion in creative service to what you love. This loving service overflows into the larger world, and it is what will help us all bring healing magic to the world together. And not a moment too soon!

The Times We're Living In

On the other side of all this deathing
An intensive labor is going on.
It is easy to see the deathing,
But not so easy to see what is birthing
Beneath the surface of the world,
Getting ready to emerge
Like a newborn crowning.

On the other side of all this deathing,
As old ways of domination and violation
Fight to hold sway,
A great birthing has begun—
The birth of a new way of being in the world,
A way of re-connection and shared power,

A way of cooperation and love.

We are flowering out of the mud of our darkest time of separation,
Evolving from the time of *me* to the time of *we*.
This time is difficult, yes, but it is also juicy and joyous.
It is not easy to soar through mud,
But mud is rich and fertile,
And out of mud The lotus blooms.

Immanence is the basis of it all—the knowing through direct experience that Spirit or Magic or *chi* animates every form on Earth. The Earth connection heals your body, mind, heart, and soul; and then you have strength to tend to the healing of the earth, which by now you love dearly, tenderly, and personally. You and I are part of everything that manifests on this Earth. We don't need to continue to let our beloved planet be abused and stolen from us. We are more powerful than we think we are, especially when we come together with joyful intent, united will, creative, magical energy, and focused love.

Cultivating your own joy and happiness not only makes your own life better; it makes what you are doing, and how you are doing it, compelling and attractive to others—as in, "Hey, those people are having fun over there! I want to play, too!" We are here to fulfill our entelechy, which is to become fully human. There is nothing that says we can't have a lot of fun doing it!

Blessed Be.

—ROBIN ROSE BENNETT

PART ONE

Reconnecting with the Earth

Healing Magic is rooted in the earth. Its basis and foundation is the realization of *immanence*, which is the recognition that the Great Mystery that gives life to the earth and Universe is *within* the earth as well as transcendent. It (God—Goddess—All-That-Is) exists

within us and within the land, and is expressed through everything—every tree, every animal, every pebble, and every so-called "inanimate" object.

We tend to think of the "everyday" as all that is commonplace, unremarkable, and even boring. Yet, the most seemingly ordinary aspects of daily life on the earth are alive with Healing Magic. To call something unremarkable simply because it happens every day and is commonly available is harmful to the enthusiasm and depth with which we can live. This perspective affects how we see the earth, too, influencing us to consider the possibility that medicinal herbs from the rainforest might be valuable, but to ignore or scorn the healing treasures that grow wild and are commonly found in our own backyards and parks.

I am going to take a moment here to further clarify how I am defining and using the words that make up the title of this book.

Healing Magic and Conscious Living

Magic is the extraordinary reality that dwells within every aspect of the mundane, material world. Healing Magic is the art of living a heartfelt life and engaging that extraordinary reality—whether you call it Magic, Spirit, the Goddess, the Universe, God, the Great Mystery, or All-That-Is—in everything you do. Being aware of and celebrating our unity within the web of life is Conscious Living.

Green

Abundant, alive, and growing ... creative energy ... sexual energy ... open-hearted love ... the life force ... healing herbs, plants, and trees ... innocence ... wonder ... Mother Nature ... the Green Woman.

Witch

A Wise Woman, sometimes a Wise Man.

"Witch" shares etymological origins with the words "wit" and "wisdom," from root words meaning "to see" and "to know."

Witches see all life as one in infinite forms, and practice magic in ways that respect the sacred spiral of life/death/rebirth.

Green Witches

Green Witches have a special love for the plants and trees of the earth, and are often gifted in working with them as gardeners, herbalists, artists, and teachers.

Guidebook

This guidebook is a map made up of words, stories, songs, rituals, recipes, instructions, invitations, meditations, trance journeys, warnings worth heeding, and heart-centered teachings.

To wake up to the magnificent beauty of the earth, even for a moment, is to know that you are alive in an abundant, magical world. It is to be humbled and inspired by true power—power that nourishes, supports, and sustains, not the abusive use of power that consumes, depletes, and violates. No matter how much power a corporation or government may wield in one moment, for good or ill, the earth's power can change that utterly, in almost no time at all. And nature's destructiveness de-structures and restructures by innate design.

There is an ancient, complex intelligence at work in the earth's natural catastrophic events such as earthquakes and volcanoes. Destruction leads to renewal and creation. For example, there are raging forest fires in the Northwestern United States that seem terrible in their devastation—and they are for some creatures. Yet fire is a necessary part of the evolutionary plan that leads to the germination of certain tree seeds, such as Sequoia seeds, which grow to be the largest living trees on Earth.

Gaia, our ancient Mother Earth, is alive and unwell. Yet she can and will heal herself when we stop actively harming her and when we go back to the "business" of taking care of one another, and ourselves, with compassionate, loving kindness.

Numerous natural life forms exist that are remarkably adept at helping the earth heal herself. Scientists are using modern technologies to apply them to our ecological challenges. Many people suffer from the mistaken belief that the earth cannot heal, that too much irreversible damage has been done.

Renewing our connection with the earth allows us to see and take heart from the abundance of regenerative substances and systems that exist on our planet. For example, in one experiment, tall and (naturally) radiant sunflowers were planted in a pond one kilometer from the Chernobyl disaster site. The Nuclear Energy Institute reported that the sunflowers absorbed through their roots all the radioactive cesium and strontium that was present. They pulled the radiation out of the water and land and into themselves.

This "technology" is very inexpensive by our current standard of resource-exploitative economics. The cost to the sunflowers, however, is radiation poisoning and death.

It is economically and ecologically practical to plant many new sunflower seeds in order to be ready with new generations of sunflowers to clean up other radioactive "messes." But it is more than practical. It is a sacred trust to plant and tend future generations of the plants that are sacrificing themselves for us now and will sacrifice their "children" for us later. The sunflowers offer their help willingly. Plants are generous medicine beings, and they love people.

The earth speaks directly to the heart, whichever part of her draws you—seashore, desert, fields, forests, plains, or mountains. I love nature shows on television, but they won't do as a substitute for the real thing. Communing with nature is essential to our being well.

We can start when we are already "there," in childhood. Each child can be "given" a special place that is his or hers alone, to know they belong to Earth and Earth belongs to them. Even cities and suburbs have parks and trees and wildflowers. Everywhere on Earth, medicinal and edible weeds can help a child be hardy—capable of endurance—and hearty—healthy and happy.

The elder races of aboriginal peoples, the sacred sisterhoods, and the trees, plants, animals, and stones have had an invisible, energetic hand in keeping the earth healthy for and in spite of "modern" people. They cannot do it for us anymore. We must all work together, as Buddhists pray, "for the benefit of all sentient beings."

People have begun to wake up and reclaim our stewardship of the earth. We also need to recover our love and joy in being *of* earth. The earth is not just

our environment, not just our primary source of resources; it is the living heart of humanity. The words "earth" and "heart" are anagrams of each other —what's the hidden message?

I remember an old farmer with a sly twinkle in his eye who sold wild greens and hand-fashioned country treasures at the city green-market where I used to shop when I lived in New York City. We often got to talking. I think he liked educating me, the nice but ignorant city woman, about the real world he knew from living his life on the land. He was aware, in a way I was not, how fundamentally dependent we all are on the health of the earth for our lives. I knew this intellectually, but intellect—knowing something—and experience—living something—are very different.

One day we were happily discussing plants we loved. I was buying wild watercress that he'd harvested the day before in a clear stream near his house. He lived just an hour and a half out of town, but it might as well have been another world. As we talked about the heart-shaped leaves of sweet blue violets and tangy yellow-flowering wood sorrel, the twinkle in his eye turned into a knowing gleam. He paused and looked at me intently. "Did you ever notice how so many things in nature are heart-shaped? I think she's trying to tell us something." He beamed at me and laughed.

Terry Tempest Williams has written that "We are in danger of becoming biologically illiterate. If we don't know the names of things, we won't miss them when they're gone." Most people walking outside where I live would look around the early spring landscape and perhaps notice a few small green plants and trees that mean nothing particular to them.

When I go right outside my door, I find a wealth of details. There are evergreen mountain laurel trees that will develop showy clusters of sticky pink-and-white blossoms in late April, leafless oaks that will birth next winter's cache of acorns for the local squirrels, maple trees with flashy red buds all over them, and slender, gleaming, black birch trees that are beginning to smell tantalizingly of wintergreen again. Looking down, I see glistening starry mosses; dry, drab-looking blueberry bushes (you'd never guess what's coming in July); a baby juniper tree; dark green periwinkle leaves, lying low, covering the ground; and little yellow coltsfoot flowers that have popped up out of the stony soil before their leaves. These soft, round flowers look like dandelions and are one of the first to come up every spring. They let me know that periwinkle's beautiful blossoms with the funny squared-off petals can't be far

behind. Velvety new lady's mantle leaves are peeking out from last year's stalks, reminding me of my great grandmother, who used their leaves for healing. Tiny baby dandelion greens make my mouth water in anticipation of wild salads; and many, many more plants and trees are coming back to life in the early springtime.

When I was a kid, one young maple tree was neatly planted in front of each house, in a little square of dirt cut out from the chemically weed-free curbside grass. We kids used to peel open the light green seed pods from their centers and paste them onto our noses with the sticky, white substance that was inside. We called the seeds pollywogs, and for a long time, I thought they were pollywog trees! I loved eating French toast with maple syrup, but never fully appreciated the connection between the young maple trees planted outside and the delicious syrup I was pouring over my favorite breakfast.

Now, when I enjoy maple syrup on French toast or pancakes, I remember that it's a gift and that it comes from the sweet, rising sap of a maple tree being reborn at the end of the winter. Maybe you were taught to say grace of some kind in thanks for your meals, but most of us have not been taught in a way that *truly awakens us* to the grace of the earth that is feeding us.

We don't see God—Goddess—All-That-Is in the maple tree we tap. It is not like "tapping" someone on the shoulder either. The tree's body is pierced to withdraw her sap, her lifeblood. We don't see our beloved Earth Mother in the greens, grains, fruits, fish, and/or animals we ingest. We don't perceive that we are in a reciprocal relationship that calls for acknowledgment and giving back, at the very least, our gratitude. To paraphrase Susun Weed, "We eat the earth, and the earth eats us."

Just as parents must draw the line sometimes to let children know when their behavior is unacceptable, Earth, the ancient mother of us all, has been demonstrating that we contemporary humans have crossed too many lines of objectionable, even intolerable, behavior.

The earth is calling us to consciousness through her climactic and geographic changes, through her increasing inability to feed us from depleted soil and polluted waters. The atmosphere's natural sunscreen, the ozone layer, is disappearing to the point where black-skinned people are getting unprecedented sunburns, and skin-cancer rates are soaring. These and more are the consequences of treating the earth like a giant manufacturing plant or

a warehouse filled with an endless stock of resources to plunder, rather than as a living, conscious home providing for billions of creatures.

The earth needs us to grow up. She needs people of privilege—people who are not starving and surviving at subsistence levels—to take back our power to support the healing of life on earth. Earth's power funds and supports us when we learn and remember how to call it in and open to receive it. We find that we *are* the earth.

> To live magically,
> To work with energy,
> You have to rekindle your senses, your instincts.
>
> To practice magic,
> To consciously engage in co-creation with nature,
> You have to remember how to see in the dark.
>
> Women lead here.
> Women remember this art.
> We embody it in our ovaries, and in our wombs.

Women have always had a unique kinship with Mother Earth through our power to bleed and give birth and nourish new life from our bodies. Still, all of us—women, men, and children (though children least of all)—suffer from the disconnection from Earth that is now commonly considered normal. Reconnecting with the earth helps awaken you to Healing Magic. At the same time, practicing magic strengthens your connection with the earth.

The earth is a mirror for all of us. Like our planet's body, our bodies are composed of about 75 percent water. Earth has extensive self-regulating filter systems for keeping her various ecosystems circulating freely, nourished, clean, and healthy. We have kidneys, lungs, digestive systems, and skin, which are all self-regulating filter systems, too. These systems—the earth's and ours—are stressed to depletion and dysfunction. We cannot harm her without harming ourselves. What is good for the earth is good, healthy, and life-promoting for us, and what is good for us is good for the earth.

Magic is indigenous to the earth and her processes of creation. Watch the land come back to life in lush, flowering abundance after a volcano covers all local forms of life with molten lava. Healing Magic is found in what is natural, what is of the earth. We are the ones who decided sometime in the age of "reason" to label the things of this world "mundane," and then came to think of that as a synonym for dull and boring.

We are of the earth, and magic is inherent in our creative processes too. Watch a baby being born after the volcanic eruptions of labor, and there can be no doubt that you are in the presence of the sacred. Watch and wait while a butterfly emerges from a caterpillar's cocoon. To this day, no one knows exactly what goes on in there. It is a mystery, yet it reveals that transformation is a natural process on the earth.

Transformation is a process that all people are being called upon to actively support and willingly participate in. Healing Magic can help people reclaim the earth from those few who clearly do not love her, or life, and return her to those billions of beings who do.

I was writing this section when the weather took a distinctive turn for the balmy, shooting up to sixty-eight degrees with bright sunshine for a couple of days. I hung up my hammock, swinging for a while in "Spring's here!" bliss. The following two days—the last of March and first of April—a blizzard fell, covering the world here with over two feet of snow and enormously deep drifts.

Hours before it started snowing, my cat was suddenly acting what I called "crazed," running back and forth across the house, running outside and back in again, and then out again. She never does that; in retrospect, it's obvious she was sensing the coming storm.

Dry, heavy snow buried the short mountain laurel trees alive, brought old oaks and young maples down, and bent 25-foot birches and pines so low, the treetops were touching the ground. Snow and wind snapped power lines, causing complete outages of life-sustaining water and heat and everything that

makes life comfortable, like electricity, lights, refrigeration, and flush toilets. (The hammock survived.)

Life without these systems is inconceivable to a good portion of rural—and virtually all suburban and urban middle-class and wealthy—people today. Most of us would have little to no idea of how to manage if we lost our income that "buys" us the earth in the form of our food and shelter, or our electricity, or the water that pours out of faucets all over the house. Common conveniences (like air-conditioning) are thought of as necessities. Poor people are getting poorer, with the decline in actual necessities that lack of money has come to mean—fresh water to drink, hot water for washing oneself, or even a place to sleep. We are utterly dependent on man-made systems, and most of us have no idea how to deal directly with the earth.

After the storm, all my neighbors left. I didn't want to leave; it was exquisitely beautiful and silent without electricity or people. I had spent fifteen of the last seventeen years of my life living in New York City. What did I know? But I gathered wood for the woodstove to give me fire for heat and cooking, stored as much food as I could in plastic bags and glass jars that I buried in the snow, and melted big bowls of snow to flush the toilet. Fortunately, I was stocked up on food and candles and flashlight batteries, and luckily, the folks I rented my cabin from kept a large quantity of gallon water bottles in the garage attached to my home.

Crews were called in to help, and eventually came from all over the country. It was a week before the power lines and felled trees were taken out of the driveway and the services were restored. It was one of the most profoundly peaceful weeks I have ever experienced.

Before the storm everyone had been saying that we hadn't had a "real" winter that year. I felt that the earth enjoyed a long-overdue winter's nap. Before walking, late at night, the mile and a half down the mountain to a waiting car on the main road, my next-door neighbor said, "In twenty years here, this is the worst storm I've ever seen." It seems we hear a lot of statements like that lately. It isn't "just our imaginations" either, in the same way that it wasn't my cat's imagination when she sensed the severity of the coming storm and became agitated hours before it began.

The earth gives us more than enough clues as to what her messages mean. We keep probing into the same questions, funding study after study, and challenging the test results when the answers we've already received are

perfectly obvious. The problem is that they require those controlling and profiting from the earth's resources to change how they do things, and share the wealth. So we hear that the evidence is inconclusive, the changes required are too expensive, or that the obvious answers are "impossible," and therefore the concerned citizens of the earth should look for another answer, more pleasing to corporate interests. What's good for large corporations these days is rarely ever good for the earth.

I've spent more than fifteen years teaching people about edible and medicinal plants that live everywhere we do—in our backyards, open lots, and city parks. Herbal medicine is effective—it works—and that's one significant reason I teach it. Underneath that, though, is another reason: Reacquainting people with the plants themselves, and the birds and animals, is equally important. It enlarges our sense of who we are, which is spirit-enhancing and magic-inducing.

I've noticed that the most skeptical people are often the ones to feel the spirit of a plant, or even to actually hear a message, which always startles them profoundly. And beyond that, when you experience directly all the different things that the plants can and will do for you, like relieve your pain or calm your nerves, you come to care about them and want to protect these valuable foods and medicines and the ground in which they grow. You might even feel that they care about you—and you wouldn't be imagining it.

I remember a woman on a medicinal plant walk telling me she felt a sense of love and kinship, like reuniting with an old friend, for a plant I had just introduced her to in Riverside Park in New York City. It puzzled her. I told her that the name of the plant was comfrey, and she lit up with a great big smile. It turned out that years earlier she had drunk comfrey leaf tea—which has been used for millennia to strengthen ligaments, cartilage, and bone, earning it the nickname "knitbone"—and it had helped speed up her recovery from a broken bone. (Internal use of comfrey *[Symphytum officinale]* is now regulated by the FDA.) "It is my old friend. This plant helped me so much. No wonder I felt like I already knew it."

It stands to reason that the more personally you experience the value of something, the more you will prize it and want to take good care of it. Without question, the earth is a prize worth cherishing. Have you ever seen the sunrise in a lavender sky at dawn? Eaten a ripe, juicy strawberry fresh from the plant? Gone swimming in the ocean, or walked barefoot on a bed of cool

star moss on a hot, dry day? Heard the whistling cry of a golden eagle flying over you? Smelled the alluring perfume of a night-blooming white moonflower?

"Magic in the Air"

Magic, magic is in the air.
Mother Earth's magic is everywhere.[1]

Simple Practices for Reconnecting with Earth

BEING ON EARTH

- Go outside and simply be. Sit, stand, or lie, with no goal or plan.

The simplest practice of all can be the most challenging for our busy, goal-oriented selves. Try it. Be still and know the earth.

AWAKENING SENSES

- Consciously breathe fresh air in a natural setting. Smell the scents that are being carried in your direction.
- Touch various natural things with your fingertips, such as stones, feathers, grass, flowers, or tree bark. Touch them with your eyes closed and notice the difference.
- Walk barefoot on different types of ground—on grass in a meadow, sand on the beach, fresh pine needles in the woods, or on smooth pebbles in a shallow stream or river. Feel the sensations of different textures under your feet.
- Listen carefully to the sounds you hear. Notice that the longer you remain quiet, the better your hearing becomes.
- Sit or stand in one place and look around you, observing as much detail as you can. Stay there for a minimum of five minutes, and notice that the longer you stay there, the more you see.

These practices help you learn to slow down and reawaken your natural senses. You can continue with more smells, sights, textures—and include tastes, too. Be creative about how you open yourself to perceive the multitude of details that are available. Tickle your cheek with pussy willows, brush your hair gently with a fallen pine bough, let an insect walk on your arm, smell a maple tree flower, taste an apple off a tree.

HEART-TO-HEART WITH MOTHER EARTH

- Lie down on the ground, on your back or your stomach. If you're on your stomach, turn your head to the right or left. Breathe deeply, in and out, and listen to your heartbeat. As you become quiet and relaxed, see if you can hear and feel the heartbeat of the earth coming up into you from the center of the planet. Feel the generous love of Mother Earth, the ancient mother of us all. Relax; she will not let you go. Open to receive. Melt into her. Feel your heartbeats merge and become one.

This practice helps you feel the protective love the earth has for you, her daughter or son. It opens you to receive nurturance and nourishment from the earth—which, in actuality, you are always receiving. Knowing the truth of this increases your sense of security and belonging, and decreases your sense of isolation and loneliness.

DRAWING ON EARTH ENERGY

- Place both feet on the ground, ideally without shoes. Consciously breathe in and out and draw the energy of the earth up into your body through the bottoms of your feet. Send love down to the earth with each exhalation. Even in a tiny city park, you can find a patch of earth, perhaps where a bush is planted.

This practice regenerates your energy physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. It is especially useful when you feel fatigued from being indoors too much or not moving your body enough. It can help lift depression, too. When I lived in the city I never thought this practice would be enough to help me. Yet I would make myself go outside and do it—and it always did help, even when I kept my shoes on.

COMMUNING WITH PLANTS AND TREES

- Sit outside with a plant or tree and do a timed writing practice. Pick a phrase such as "This plant (or tree) says ..." as a starting point. Commit to write for a specific length of time that you've decided on in advance, from five to thirty minutes, without lifting the pen off the page at all. Repeat your starting phrase at any point if you get stuck, as many times as necessary, so you don't stop writing (as described in Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones*). Let the writing go anywhere it wants. When you're done, read what you've written out loud to yourself or someone else. I guarantee that something you've written will surprise you and teach you something.

- Sit outside with a plant and consciously connect with it through the exchange of breath. Plants exhale oxygen and inhale carbon dioxide. Humans do the opposite. Open to receive the gift of breath as you inhale and share the gift of life-sustaining carbon dioxide with "your" plant as you exhale. This symbiotic relationship is always taking place, and it is of primary importance. If it weren't for the plants and trees, you wouldn't be able to breathe. Breathe in and out with conscious awareness, and let yourself experience the living relationship you share with the plant, which until now, only it has been conscious of. Let it touch your heart.

These two practices can help you feel the love that plants and trees share with human beings. They help you to experience the common spirit or consciousness that emanates from us all. The plant may even communicate specific information and guidance to you.

These are among the practices that helped herbalists and medicine people originally learn which plants were good for food and medicine and which were hallucinogenic or poisonous. You might even be lucky or receptive enough to hear the plant's song!

CHOOSING A GUARDIAN TREE

- Go to a tree that you feel attracted to. It doesn't matter if you know what kind of tree it is. Bring an offering that you can place all around the base of the tree. For example, you can give away water, cornmeal, tobacco,

sunflower seeds, or even chocolate chips. Anything natural that you truly value is a good give-away.

- Imagine looking at yourself through the "eyes" of the tree. Take a few minutes to be quiet together, and then ask the tree (in the privacy of your own being or out loud) if it is willing to be your guardian, your protector. If you hear or feel an affirmative response from the tree, imagine growing psychic roots from the bottoms of your feet and from your own root center, right between your legs, and letting them intertwine with the roots of your tree. Thank it, and visit it whenever you can. Call on it, in person or in your imagination, when you are in need of guardian energy, whether for physical or emotional protection. The tree will always hear and know you, specifically.

This practice of bonding with a certain tree helps with the special medicine that trees offer us. They know their place in the universe because they live with their roots in the earth. This security is something we humans have to trade in order to have our freedom of movement (something very intriguing to trees). Trees are also very patient (remember the slow-moving Ents in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*?) and can help you learn to trust your own timing.

The trees, too, can benefit from their exchanges with humans. I remember Tara, an apprentice, telling me that she heard the voice of her most beloved hemlock tree one day, asking, "What do I look like to you?" Tara carefully observed the tree in as much detail as possible, and then mentally sent the image out to the grand old hemlock tree. According to Tara, the tree was quite pleased with itself.

Another time, I was out walking and I saw my student Cathy standing about fifty feet away from a splendid willow tree with her eyes closed and her palms facing forward. She was sharing her love and energy with the tree. I quietly walked over and joined in by giving the tree a big bear hug. Cathy later told the group that she'd felt the willow tree suddenly light up with what felt like a burst of sheer joy. She was so taken with the sensation that she opened her eyes just in time to see me unwrapping my arms from around the tree. She then realized she'd felt the tree responding to my hug.

EATING WITH AWARENESS

- Make a delicious, beautiful meal for yourself out of whatever you want, though this practice works best if it is done with real food—unprocessed, unpackaged, organically raised meat, fruits, grains, vegetables, nuts, and/or seeds. Eat with your full attention, not talking, reading, listening to music, or watching television.
- Think about where the foods on your table may have come from. Fruits, nuts, and spices from bushes or trees? Salt, fish, or seaweeds from the ocean? Carrots, potatoes, or onions from under the ground? Perhaps from grass seeds, like rice, millet, or barley? From animals, like cows or pigs, or from birds, like chickens and their eggs? Maybe you're having a glass of wine or beer; grapes and hops are both fruits of the vine. If you're drinking water, do you know its source?

This practice invites you to appreciate the multitude of forces that come together in the foods and beverages the earth births to sustain you. Sun and moonlight, wind and rain, human labor, and perhaps animal or insect labor were involved in producing what you are eating. This is not even taking into account the energy that goes into packaging, storing, and transporting your food. Realize that the food that nourishes you and gives you pleasure comes from the earth and is rich with the living energy of air, fire, water, earth, and spirit. This is what you are eating and drinking, too.

GROWING NEW LIFE

- Plant a seed or a small plant in the earth or in a pot of soil on your kitchen windowsill. Water it. Watch it grow.

This practice is as basic and wonderful as it gets. Just as women grow life with our bodies, the earth grows life continuously. This practice also reminds us that much of the most important growth happens "invisibly" in the darkness, out of sight under the soil. Darkness is fertile and as essential for birthing new life as sunlight, air, and water. In fact, it is even dark inside the center of the sun.

DEATH AND REBIRTH IN THE GARDEN

- Create a compost pile out of your kitchen vegetable scraps and skins, and/or with leaves and garden clippings. Observe how the most beautiful foods decompose over time, going through death and decay to become fertile, luscious soil for growing new food, herbs, trees, and flowers. Use the newly created soil for your garden or house plants. You might even find new plants growing right out of your compost pile, without waiting to be put into a garden. I put beetroot scraps in mine that still had some crown attached, and got vibrant new beet greens.
- Apartment dwellers can compost and connect with the earth's transformative powers by buying or building a worm box. The red worms eat your kitchen scraps, and gift you with wonderful soil for your houseplants and herbs.

These last two practices can help you take part in the processes of death and decay that are vital to the fertile magic of the earth. I inadvertently helped the doorman in my city apartment reconnect with the earth, too. I joyously exclaimed, "Oh, great, my worms are here!" as he handed me the package. (Suffice it to say, it was a good thing he'd already handed them to me.)

RELEASING GRIEF

- Go outside to a place where you have total privacy, or at least a reasonable amount, if total privacy is unavailable or uncomfortable to you. Dig a small hole in the earth. Ask Mother Earth to help you as you release your grief (the grief can be over a specific thing or a general feeling that is weighing you down). Cry over and into the hole in the earth for as long as you need to. Feel her receive your tears without judgment.
- Know the earth can receive anything (feeling, energy, illness) that you are ready and willing to let go of without harm to her. She uses what you release as compost. Honor your feelings and ask her to help you transform them into creative energy that you can use to share your unique gifts. Fill the hole back up. Cover the opening with the soil and rocks that you removed and tap them back down with a gentle, loving touch. You may wish to leave an offering of your own on top, such as a crystal or a flower, some seeds, or a piece of fruit.

I have heard variations of this practice from different people and thank Lucy Yepa Lowden, a Jemez Pueblo elder and artist from New Mexico, for originally describing it to me, and for offering it to my best friend, who was in need of it at the time. This practice can be used as often as needed and is amazingly helpful and comforting. It can also serve to replenish the connection that you have never truly lost with Earth.

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1 The sheet music for this chant can be found in the appendix on page 221.

PART TWO

Engaging Mystery

Everything real is mysterious. Magic can't be completely understood with the mind any more than love can. It is supposed to be felt, like music or poetry; experienced, like sexual passion;

entered into, as an adventure! It invites you into directly knowing the nature of reality and perceiving truth for yourself.

There is the odd yet inescapable duality and oneness of existence—matter/spirit, female/male, health/illness, good/evil, up/down, work/play, right/wrong, night/day, moon/sun, inhalation/exhalation, life/death. Mystery asks us to accept that nothing is either/or. Everything is both/and, containing what seems to be the "other" within itself.

There are countless mysteries to be engaged—love, sex, birth, growth, aging, death, decay, and rebirth; menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause; auras, comets, and stars; orbiting planets, the Milky Way, the spiral nebulae outside and within us—and our earthly bodies, made of the same ancient materials as the stars.

We don't know what keeps our cells pulsing with life, birthing and dying every millisecond. We do know, however, that our cells work together, creating magnificent systems—musculoskeletal, skin, cardiovascular, nervous, glandular, hormonal, digestive, respiratory, and more—that are as natural to us as the earth's rivers and gold veins are to the planet. We are always physically creating ourselves anew.

We know that our immune systems birth specific lymphatic cells to identify, tag, and destroy antigens that threaten us, but we don't know how this consciousness comes to exist in us. It is the same interior consciousness that guides our embryonic growth in the womb, and may guide embryonic growth all our lives. We can talk about genetics, but what designs and encodes our genes? We can talk about the strong influence of electromagnetic energies, but what fuels the forces that charge us? We can speculate about chemical composition, but who or what did the composing? And this consciousness that is who we are never dies, but moves out of our bodies when "we" die. Who are we? To whom and to what are we connected? Where did we come from? Where are we going?

Our physical bodies are an organic, ever-shifting reflection of our energy bodies. We need to become aware of the seven primary energy centers that are a central part of who we are in order to awaken them. They are also called chakras, which is Sanskrit for "wheels of light."

These chakras relate to particular aspects of our human experience and are connected to our nervous and glandular systems. Perhaps most important, these spinning vortices of energy contain and reveal habitual patterns that

may no longer be serving us. Working with the chakras (energy) creates beneficial changes (physical) in your life.

The seven primary chakras, or energy centers, are written about extensively from a variety of cultural perspectives in many fine books (for example, Barbara Brennan's *Hands of Light*, or Judith Anodea's *Wheels of Life*). I will give a basic working description of them here—including where they are in relationship to your physical body—to encourage you to learn more about them. I will also offer you a few ways to experience their magical reality for yourself, using colors, sounds (developed by Kay Gardner), and some plants that can specifically help open and awaken the different energetic centers.

The Seven Chakras

ROOT (BASE OF SPINE AND PERINEUM, BETWEEN YOUR LEGS)

Color: Red

Meaning: Connection to immanent spirit; feeling at home on the earth; security, survival

Sound: Ooooh (as in "too")

Plants: Burdock, dandelion, poke, or comfrey roots; Grandma cedar leaves; and almost all trees

WOMB/BELLY (JUST BELOW THE NAVEL)

Color: Orange

Meaning: Sexuality, lunar/cyclical wisdom, creative fertility

Sound: Ohhhh (as in "oh")

Plants: Wild carrot plant; raspberry leaves; ginger root; lady's mantle leaves, stalks, and flowers; orange flowers and fruits

SOLAR PLEXUS (BETWEEN YOUR RIBS, BY THE DIAPHRAGM/STOMACH)

Color: Golden-yellow

Meaning: Personal solar power, uniqueness, "I am"

Sound: Awwww (as in "awe")

Plants: Stinging nettles, dandelion flowers, yellow dock roots

HEART (CENTER OF CHEST, BETWEEN BREASTS)

Color: Green (sometimes rose-pink)

Meaning: The bridge between immanent and transcendent spirit; love

Sound: Ahhhh (as in "ah")

Plants: Hawthorn blossoms and berries; rose hips and flowers; plantain leaves and roots; white pine needles; violet leaves

THROAT

Color: Sky-blue

Meaning: Self-expression; communicating your heart's truth; the bridge that connects your head (intellect) and body (senses)

Sound: Ehhhh (as in "ecstasy")

Plants: Borage leaves and flowers; sassafras leaves and roots; black or silver birch bark, leaves and twigs; red clover blossoms

FIRST EYE (CENTERED BETWEEN EYEBROWS, COMMONLY CALLED THIRD EYE)

Color: Indigo

Meaning: Insight, intuitive wisdom; seeing the deepest reality of beauty and truth in everything

Sound: Ihhhh (as in "intuition")

Plants: Cronewort leaves, stalks, and flowers; elder flowers and berries; Ginkgo biloba leaves; lavender flowers

CROWN (TOP OF HEAD)

Color: Purple/violet

Meaning: Connectedness to transcendent Spirit; feeling at home in the cosmos; oneness, freedom

Sound: Eeeee (as in "we")

Plants: Ginkgo biloba leaves, violet flowers, echinacea flowers; wild carrot blossoms

You can use the colors to help strengthen your work with a particular energy center. For example, if you are focusing on opening or energizing the root center chakra, you can wear more red, sit on a red blanket or pillow when you meditate, draw or paint everyday objects red, or eat red foods to heighten your awareness of the root-chakra energy.

Different sound vibrations have been used to open the chakras for thousands of years. Sit quietly, indoors or outdoors, and practice intoning these sounds for each of the chakras. Pay attention to any feeling you become aware of in the body area that corresponds to the chakra tone you are singing. You can also place your hands over the energy center to feel any warmth or vibration that may develop there as you practice.

The plants listed are not the only ones that can help you open specific energy centers, but these are all commonly available and can be made into herbal teas, baths, oils, or other preparations to help you develop awareness of your energetic body and these spiraling vortexes of energy. (See Part IV for directions on making internal and external herbal preparations.) Sitting with the plant or tree while you tone the chakra sound is another way the plants can help.

We are ready, as a species, to become fully aware of the life-altering fact that we are creative energy more than solid matter. Consciously understanding this fact, and living with that awareness in our daily lives, will be evolutionary. It will help us fulfill our human entelechy.

I first heard the word *entelechy* ("en-TEL-a-kee") from Jean Houston, a brilliant pioneer of the human potential movement. She explained the meaning by saying, "It is the entelechy of an acorn to become an oak tree." Entelechy is the vital force that guides what we, and all life forms, are growing

into. We don't know if our human entelechy is a genetically encoded pattern, is dangling in the dendrites of our nerve cells, or is even physically detectable. However, the concept of entelechy suggests that we possess an internal map of the territory through which we are traveling. We are on an evolutionary journey toward full expression of who we are meant to become as human beings. The dictionary defines entelechy as "soul." Perhaps it is akin to an Oversoul or Innersoul that we share as a species.

Wherever it comes from, it is intrinsic. You get a taste of feeling connected with it when you are laughing or crying deeply, having an orgasm, doing anything you really love to do, and in personal moments of epiphany either dramatic or quiet as you experience communion with your true nature. When you get excited and powerfully drawn to a particular path in life, when you "follow your bliss," as Joseph Campbell put it, you bring more love into the world. This inevitably, synchronistically, and even mysteriously helps everyone else move toward fulfilling their entelechy too.

One clue we've had for a long time about our unrealized potential is the disproportionately large size of our brains relative to the small percentage we currently use. Isn't it likely that if we were designed with underutilized brains, we were also designed with the capacity to develop the skills necessary to access more of them when the time is right?

Francis Crick, Gordon Watson, and Maurice Wilkins were awarded a Nobel Prize in 1962 for having discovered the living, double-spiral structure of our DNA. Rosalind Franklin, a female scientist, had been working on it too, and only years later, after her early death from cancer, did her fellow scientists give her long-overdue respect and credit as one of the discoverers of the double helix. They spent over a decade simulating and testing possible structures that always turned out to be incorrect. When they finally found the true model, Watson said, "This time, I knew before we tested it that we'd found it. It was too beautiful not to be it" (Gordon Watson, *The Double Helix*).

At its heart, life is beautiful. Magical. Multidimensional. Ever-spiraling, cyclically and rhythmically. Mystery involves intuitive processes and stimulates intellectual ones. We tend to overemphasize and over-rely on our minds to the point where we disengage from our bodies and let our instincts and intuition atrophy. This is neither safe nor wise, and causes us to live in more fear than is healthy. We can redevelop these capabilities as the natural,

creative life skills they are, and then we can more easily trust in our innate capacity to feel, sense, and know things without outside corroboration.

Culturally, we're taught to give our authority away to "experts" who are supposed to know what is best for us in every area of life from politics to nutrition to our sex lives. We're told the meaning of a political speech we've just heard; we're instructed knowledgeably about what kind of food or lover is good for us (at least this month); and a medical expert may state with great authority, "You are well," when you know something is wrong—and a machine won't reveal the problem until the following year (during which time you might have been taking care of yourself with non-invasive methods). Sometimes you're told, "You are sick," and though you know you're well, you submit to dangerous, debilitating treatments.

The experts generally disagree with each other, or change their minds frequently, but we are taught to trust and be guided by outside authority even when we know better.

Sometimes our common sense, our dreams, or our body wisdom is clearly telling us a different story, but we don't trust what we know because we don't know how we know it. Cultivating our physical and magical senses and trusting in mystery helps us take back our own knowing and stand in our own power in the day-to-day world.

We stifle our own almost-conscious awareness regularly for fear of seeming foolish or too different. Just because something is dramatically mysterious—like seeing a ghost or an angel, or knowing before getting the news that someone has died, or receiving a phone call from an estranged loved one after meditatively exploring new ways to accept and relate to that person—does not automatically mean that it is false. Mystery means that something is inexplicable, not that it is unreal, and mystery is not even "supernatural"—it is natural. To quote a character from the TV show *The X-Files*, "Nothing happens in contradiction to nature—just to what we *know* of nature."

Many people have told me I am the only one they will tell their wild, fantastic story to, because they know I won't judge them as weird, crazy, or abnormal. I listen, but I can't help thinking that when people talk more honestly to each other, no one will need to worry about whether or not they are "normal."

My mother once received a letter from Linda, our cousin in Los Angeles. Linda was very distressed about an experience her friend Sylvia (not her real

name) had just described to her. She had been driving down the road when a police officer pulled her over for swerving and driving too slowly. He suspected her of drunk driving. As he asked her for her license and registration, he barked, "All right, what's the problem here?" and she dazedly answered him, "I know you're going to think I'm crazy and you won't believe me; I probably shouldn't even say any more ... but I was driving along and suddenly I saw an angel. It was enormous. And so beautiful...."

She stopped, embarrassed, because her voice broke as she held back a sob. Afraid of the expression she'd see on his face, she ventured a look at him. To her amazement, the macho cop had tears in his eyes. He was shaking his head, as if to clear it of impossible information.

"Another one. I don't believe it," he said, muttering to himself, wonderingly. "Go on, get out of here."

"You believe me?" she couldn't help asking incredulously.

"Lady, I don't know what I believe anymore, but I can see the state you're in. It's the same as the other two. This is the third time this has happened on this road today."

Linda wrote to my mother, "Judy, I'm really scared about this. I don't understand it, and I think it's so frightening. What do you think it means?!" My mother, similarly shaken, asked me the same question.

I think it means there are angels, and that Sylvia was lucky enough to see one, to be graced with a vision that touched her deeply. The police officer, though he didn't experience it directly, was touched through the others' experiences. They, and everyone they tell, are being invited to realize that magic and mystery are available to us in our lives. Love and guidance are always there for us to receive. We have guardian angels. Our insistence on aligning stolidly only with the physical world, with human, cultural reality as we know it, has no effect on the multidimensional, energetic stuff of which life is actually composed. You can limit your perception, but not life itself.

Many years ago, my mother had breast cancer. Some time after recovering from a radical mastectomy and the radiation treatments that followed, she heard about a course called Silva Mind Control, created by a man named José Silva in Laredo, Texas.

The course was focused on helping people access the hidden potential of the mind. She told my father that she wanted the two of them to go. Perhaps it would help her to stay well, she told him, and she thought it would be fun to

explore new territory together. It was being offered as an intensive four-day course, and I will always remember how they looked at the end of it—joyous and clear and more alive. They were lit with a vibrant, inner glow. My dad, who had aged visibly during my mother's illness, had dropped ten years off his face and posture. I had little or no desire to attend these classes before they went, mostly because I didn't like the phrase "mind control," but I'd always been drawn to life's mysteries. I knew I needed to go wherever they had just been.

My mother agreed to take me sometime soon when the same teachers, whom she and my father had especially liked, were teaching the course again. Before we had the opportunity to go, I decided to drive cross-country by myself to move to California, which my parents were adamantly against. I was determined to move, so I figured I would have to convince them somehow and I hoped I would get to take the course some other time. But I broke my ankle by slipping on an invisible sheet of ice in my parents' driveway. It was one o'clock in the morning, and snowing. Between the pain I was in and the ice I was on, I couldn't get up. I knew I had broken a bone and I was trying to figure out what to do when I saw (I thought I must be hallucinating), a boy come jogging down the block. I flagged him down with an embarrassed cry for help.

When he'd finished half-dragging, half-carrying me into the house, he asked, "Will it be okay if I call my father?"

"Sure," I said, "but why?"

"He's the head of the volunteer ambulance corps here in town," he answered, reaching for the phone.

When I came home from the hospital with my leg in a cast, it was obvious I wouldn't be driving my five-speed stick-shift car cross-country, as I'd planned. My mother taught me how to go about healing myself with what she'd learned in the class. My orthopedic surgeon said it wasn't possible to heal the type of fracture I had in the amount of time we proposed to him. My mother nodded gravely while he spoke, but as soon as we were alone she winked and whispered, "Won't he be surprised?!"

He was surprised. His face went whiter than my cast when he looked at the X-ray one afternoon and said I could get the cast off that day, just a little over halfway into the minimum amount of time he had mandated for my healing. I was hooked again. I had to go and learn more about this powerful,

mysterious energy I'd always felt, but had no matrix for. I also got a feeling I was supposed to meet the two teachers, who were, in fact, to become my first spiritual teachers and lifelong friends, and with whom I'd work for almost ten years.

In retrospect, it was obvious that I'd needed to take the course and connect with them before I moved to California for a few years, so that when I moved back East I would be ready to join them in their work. By then they had started their own course (*No Bad Feelings*, Spencer/Graham). But this was 1977, and they were teaching the Silva method, a wonderful introduction to the mystery and potential of human capabilities.

In one part of the class, near the end, everyone does what is called "cases." These are actually psychic or intuitive medical readings. Each person writes on a piece of paper the name of someone who is ill and in need of assistance. Primed by four days of meditative, intuitiondevelopment exercises, everyone pairs off and attempts to "see" the problem of the person whose name is written down. The partners then send that person unconditional love and energy—prayer, in other systems of belief—for healing.

We were then warned that if we tried to use this exercise to prove something—our own skills, or whether or not what we had been learning and doing was valid—it wouldn't work. This was said immediately after I thought to myself, "Well, this will prove whether all this stuff about everything and everyone being connected energetically is real or not." So, impressed with their timing, I decided to take their advice, let go of trying to prove anything, and approach the exercise with the open mind and heart I'd brought to the rest of the experiences.

When done with love, the teachers told us, it always works. It did. Approximately fifty people—nuns, accountants, actors, students, lawyers, waiters, and woodworkers—did accurate psychic readings. It was mind-boggling to see that anyone could do it, and heart-opening to touch the truth of how related we actually are to each other. We had experienced being beyond time and space.

I knew that an important door had opened for me that would affect how I lived the rest of my life. I felt high as a kite. And clear. I felt I had found a natural way to feel as happy and expansive and connected to all life as I had previously only been able to experience when I had tried LSD and had had a great experience. I didn't know then that I still had about twenty years to go

before I would also feel genuinely grounded, happy, and centered in my unique self, but the connectedness was so inspiring and empowering that I'm not sure I would have cared. I was flying!

Some people got a lot more than medical/health information. My mother saw her "subject" playing piano at a big concert hall.

"Like Carnegie Hall," she told her partner.

"What's happening?" he replied.

"Well, it's over, and he's getting a standing ovation. They finally let him go after three encores." She opened her eyes, puzzled, and said, "I don't know what that was about."

"My friend is playing at Carnegie Hall today, a debut performance!" her partner said.

"Really?" my mother asked, looking at him suspiciously, thinking he might be kidding her.

The next day's newspaper confirmed that his debut had been a great success. My mother had "seen" it exactly as it had happened. He'd received a standing ovation and done three encores. She told me she never wanted to do anything like that again.

"Why not? It's wonderful!" I exclaimed, buzzing with excitement. I was totally enchanted.

"It scares me," she said, "How can I know these things? I don't understand it; it's too unreal."

We are often afraid of the people, places, and activities that bewitch and enchant us. We distrust them. Even "charming" can be a compliment tinged with disbelief. And yet it's not illusions we're afraid of, it's reality. We fear the reality and responsibility of our own power, and the mysterious nature of the life-force that connects us in relationship with one another and All-That-Is. Physics has scientifically revealed this ancient spiritual truth; and it is truth, despite our firmly held beliefs—and often the "evidence" of our senses—that we are solid and separate. When you begin to truly awaken your senses, you discover that the essential nature of humanness can more truthfully be described as fluid and inseparable. We long for this unity at the same time that we fear it.

I am struck, periodically, by synchronicities as I write this book. Writing on duality and oneness, the mystery of unity that exists behind and beneath the illusion of separation, I decided to walk outside for a short mind/body stretch. On the way back, I saw a tall feather standing up beneath an oak tree, its quill tip planted in the earth. I felt drawn to look at it more closely. Upon examination, I saw that I had found a feathery yin/yang symbol, half solid black curved down into half opaque white, forming a syzygy. The word "syzygy," for the Taoist yin/yang symbol, is also a term for the perfect conjunctions and oppositions of sun, earth, and moon that cause solar and lunar eclipses—mysterious, magical, celestial events. I touched the ground and offered a prayer of gratitude before taking the feather inside.

Throughout the ages, people have experienced awareness of deep dimensions of interconnectedness, awe, and mystery with the help of psychoactive plants and drugs. These days, such substances are usually unavailable or outlawed, supposedly because they are too dangerous to be used. They are hard on the body, but they are also banned because they can be too liberating. People who are free, liberated from within, are not people whose needs and desires can be easily controlled and manipulated. This decidedly does not serve the interests of corporate culture that depends on citizens being turned into consumers who are always needy, greedy and dissatisfied, and anesthetized with drugs that dull and diminish the senses rather than using plants that sharpen and expand them.

Power plants and medicines offer teachings, and point the way to open doorways. Used wisely, in a sacred, respectful way, they can be helpful, just as when used unwisely or to excess, power plants and drugs, whether pharmaceutical, recreational, or spiritually oriented, can be harmful.

Anthony Andoh, an herbalist from Ghana who lives in San Francisco, writes about how the root of the iboga *(Tabernanthe iboga)* shrub that grows wild in Gabon, Africa is mixed with other plants and used in his village community for initiation and visioning (Anthony Andoh, *Science and Romance of African Medicinal Plants*). It is used to help people remember who they truly

are, and to travel through time and space to speak to their ancestors for guidance or, as he voiced it, "You can speak to your mother's mother's mother."

Traditionally, and similar to some indigenous peoples' rituals in North, Central, and South America, the entire community can be involved in journeying into sacred dimensions of consciousness. This is undertaken with great respect and nurturance. Initiates are helped to integrate what they experience into their lives. The visions of continuity from one life to the next, of forgotten but pivotal memories from this life, and of one generation speaking to the next, can continue for days and are, according to all reports, healing. The experience of delving together into mystery helps people experience themselves as a community bonded in love and mutual responsibility, and at the same time to be more aware and respectful of their unique selves.

The pale-by-comparison Western version of this might be how a sports team declares itself to be "all for one, and one for all." But even when there's love there, it's a short-term commitment at best and exists only in relationship to being against everybody else. Also, our local communities only seem to bond deeply in the face of an acutely desperate crisis (as opposed to chronically desperate crises, like poverty, that we've come to think of as normal).

If African ceremonies and ritual use of plant medicines seem in any way irrelevant to our Western world and the current crises facing us, consider the effect of one "trip" or journey done with ibogaine, the drug first made from the iboga plant's most active alkaloids in 1901. It takes away withdrawal symptoms, as testified by countless heroin users and, astonishingly, it takes away the desire to take drugs.

A single dose of ibogaine can interrupt drug use for six months or longer. John Morgan, professor of pharmacology at City University of New York Medical School, said that at first he found the stories hard to accept, but he was surprised and encouraged when he looked at the evidence. Even done in a hospital setting, it has been beneficial enough, coupled with counseling, to inspire people with enough sense of universal meaning and personal worth and purpose to help them release addictions to substances including alcohol, heroin, nicotine, and cocaine.

You might think ibogaine would be implemented in treatment centers across America, but the drug is still outlawed by the U.S. Drug Enforcement

Administration as a Schedule I illegal substance, and trials and tests for clinical use in the United States are discouraged by lack of funding, even though over 140 scientific papers had been written about ibogaine by 1999.

In 1989, one hundred years after the plant was introduced to Europeans, a Dutch drug addict was one of the first people to receive a strong dose of ibogaine. Here is a short excerpt of her report on the experience, two years later: "I don't experience events in the past as a problem anymore. I experience the present, with the past as a reflection, not as an obstacle, but as a source of collective information. The realization of the collective consciousness is a mystical, religious experience. It confirms a unity with all living beings, and old feelings of separation between you and the outside world disappear."

This drug must make scientific researchers very uncomfortable because they don't understand it and can't measure it. Drug abuse enforcers don't like it because consciousness-altering substances are "no way to fight a war on drugs." There is concern that the hallucinogenic effects may be pleasurable, but the addicts themselves say that their experience with ibogaine is not as a party drug but a serious encounter with the self.

Whatever can't be controlled is feared, and what can't be profited from is deemed unimportant, or ignored altogether. Sexual ecstasy, for another example, can be a deeply moving and freely accessible pathway to expanded levels of consciousness and connectedness, and has long been recognized as such. Therefore, our natural, loving sexuality—especially that of women—has been subjected to the most rigid judgments, controls, and injunctions possible by those seeking to control and limit the human beings entrusted to their care and guidance.

A sacred plant ritual, a loving sexual relationship, or any other activity that helps you find the creative, exuberant qualities inside yourself is considered to be of "no use." Passive spectators are favored over active participants, just as consuming is valued over creating. The corporate mindset prefers to profit from your genuine desires. It does this by manipulation—interfering with your access to what is natural, and then manufacturing, packaging, and selling your desire back to you as a changed and colder thing than the original ever was. This is true regarding sex, music, healing herbs, intoxicants, sports, food, childbirth, politics, work, aging healthily, and much more.

Fortunately, there are many ways to engage mystery, cultivate your vision, and raise focused energy that can be translated into skillful action. Most of

them don't even cost any money. They include: walking in nature, gardening, singing, chanting, drumming, dancing, tai chi, yoga, chi kung, various forms of trance, breath work, meditation, engaging herbal allies, and practicing magic. Any of these, and more, especially when done as part of personal or community ritual and ceremony, can be consciousness-altering and can induce joy.

By the late 1800s, the Apache Indians in North America feared that their spirits might be stolen, and they dreaded losing the only thing they felt they had left. Yaqui Indians came from Mexico bringing the gift of peyote with them in order to help. Jamie Sams writes about this in *The Sacred Path Cards* deck. She was taught that "The Peyote Ceremony is a sacred ritual that propels the spirit into the crack in the universe where there is no time, no space, just the raw energy of Creation coming from Great Mystery." This enabled the people to see into the Void and know that they would always continue to live in one form or another. There was no more fear of their souls being trapped or stolen, because there was no longer a fear of death.

Engaging mystery—seeing the reality beyond the veil of illusion we call "real life"—is spiritually empowering and can help all of us choose life over death.

Death/Rebirth

The mysterious miracles of your conception and birth are juxtaposed all your life with the inescapable knowledge of your own eventual death and with the pain of knowing you will "lose" loved ones who die before you. In Western cultures that is the most feared mystery of all. We have become dis-integrated from the most inevitable and life-altering experience we are absolutely guaranteed to have from the moment we are born. We keep death at a distance. We don't want to explore what it is and what it means until we have no choice.

How you feel about death strongly affects how you live your life. And yet, if we think about it at all, it is generally to figure out how to delay or outwit it for another day, month, or year. This is not the same as choosing to live fully.

I can eat whole, nourishing foods and be physically active because I don't want to get sick and die, or because I want optimum health for myself. These intentions yield different results. The first approach puts me in a defensive posture that automatically throws off my health and equilibrium, while the

second embraces and affirms the possibility of health, and invites self-love to resonate through my body.

We are altering our bodies and faces through chemical and surgical procedures so as not to have to "face" it when we are growing closer to death than to birth. We don't want to prepare for it. We are taught to deny death until our final moments, to fear it, and to hide any signs of it. We have also largely forgotten to honor our ancestors, and may live far away from where their ashes are scattered or their bones are buried. Unfortunately, all of this makes it extremely difficult to trust life, since you know this is where it's leading you.

A dear friend of mine met and fell in love with a wonderful woman from the Midwest who had spent many years of her life sailing. She traveled all over the earth to beautiful, exotic places. In the few years right before they met, she had had serious life-and-death struggles with both breast cancer and hepatitis. Now she is well and vibrant again, but when she experiences pain or fatigue—from gardening, or long work hours—she becomes frightened. My friend said he often heard the classic story of a person living a cramped, fearful life until coming out the other side of a catastrophic illness. The story usually told is that the person becomes joyful and fearless in going after their dreams; having faced death, they are free. He wryly commented, "The woman I love did the opposite. She was always a free spirit interested only in the moment, but now that she's faced death and survived these health crises, she often worries about the future and tries so hard to control what will happen tomorrow that she sacrifices the present."

On the other side of the coin, I was deeply moved by the words of a man named Michael Brennan, whom I've never met. He wrote:

"Now, sitting on the cusp of death myself, I find an empty space within me. Oddly, this emptiness carries with it a certain abandon and a delicious sense of anticipation; I have nothing to lose. My imminent mortality seems to offer a slim chance of recouping what I've lost—my experience of the world as a waking dream of great beauty and mystery" (Michael Brennan, "Of Dreams and Sorcery: An Interview with Carlos Castaneda," *The Sun* magazine, September 1997).

We have to achieve a balanced perspective, as individuals and culturally. The development of meaningful rituals to incorporate death back into the fabric of our lives is of paramount importance. There is movement toward bringing

birthing and dying back into our homes. This is healing. We need to witness natural births and deaths in the flesh. These sacred mysteries are the primary turning points in any life, and to deny them wounds our psyches and our relationships.

I am not talking about witnessing death through the epidemics of murder and suicide; that is an altogether different thing, revealing the extremes of separation, not the unity of nature's cycles. When death is seen as an intrinsic part of life's natural cycles—a healthy progression bringing release and expansion into a larger existence—we don't have to fear it as we have been taught. The loss of loved ones will still tear us open psychically. It is part of being human. Everyday armors will dissolve in rushes of grief that alter your sense and perception of the world around you. Your sense of your place in the world will still shift forever when someone close to you dies. But you will not fear the mystery of death itself. You will trust its place in your life within the cycle of life, death, and rebirth, and let that trust cradle you as you grieve and heal. You will grow, and you will dance your joys again. Death is natural. It is an everyday mystery that, like birth, never ceases to amaze us, and though it can be searingly painful, it is at the heart of life, and there is beauty in it.

I believe that death is another form of birth. I imagine that living in the womb is warm and comfortable. We are nurtured and nourished, and cushioned from life's shocks while resting in warm, salty water. Our mother's heartbeat tells us that we are never alone, and that we are loved. Everything is as it "should be," although day after day we feel a little more crowded.

Then one day our world changes radically. Everything around us begins moving. Our mother's hormones dance with wild abandon, leading to contractions that push us out into the unknown. Mysterious forces are ejecting us from our home. We are losing everything we have known and loved. The force is too strong to fight. It is intractable, and will have its way with us eventually. We are thrust out of our mother's womb, into a tiny, dark passageway. The end of the world, and of life as we have known it, has come.

Yet, of course, when we make our way out of the vaginal tunnel through which we enter this world, we are not dead. We are alive in a much vaster world than the one we have known, in which we felt safe and comfortable. We simply outgrew it. We will now have opportunities to grow, expand, and explore that were not possible before. Our human capacity could not have been fully achieved in the limited world we knew and trusted. Also, we are no

longer only limited to sharing a loving relationship with our mother. Yet, the desire for union, for hearts beating close together, will never leave us. I suspect that the powerful bond between mother and child is a tantalizing reminder, a physical version of our memory of the eternal union we share with the Great Mystery. So, perhaps death, like birth, only seems like the end of our lives. Maybe it offers us a vast, new territory to expand into and explore.

My friend and first teacher, June, tells a story about a friend of hers, Marilyn (not her real name), whose father died shortly after her baby was born. Marilyn looked searchingly at her father's face when he died. There was something about the expression he wore that was so familiar it was puzzling. She kept asking herself, "Where have I seen that look before?"

People asked her how she was holding up after the funeral. They were surprised at how peaceful she seemed. "It was the look," she later told June. "I finally figured out where I'd seen it before. The look on my father's face when he died was the same expression I saw on my baby's face right after she was born. I feel okay now, because I know my father has gone to the same place my baby just came from."

Ultimately and intimately, life is a mystery. We are not meant to be its masters, in spite of what and how we have been taught. Where there is a master, there is a slave. Power, in this view of the world, means power-over. It presumes that natural forces work against us rather than with us: "Either life wins, or I win."

We try again and again to force life to be neat. Logical. Controllable. But it isn't. When you cram life into a box that is too small for it, you are not diminishing life; you simply diminish yourself. Mystery asks us not to demand an answer to the question "Why?" When you embrace mystery, as it exists, you begin to come into your true power.

You can honor mystery by learning to engage it, by becoming its creative and responsive partner. You can live life moment-to-moment, creating more vibrancy and life energy for yourself and those around you. When you try to control life you will always fail, and end up damming the life force inside you —an inevitable result of working against the natural flow of the universe, which is free and always changing.

For example, perhaps I've planned a day in the park with my students to identify local medicinal plants, and the weather report comes on the radio and states that rain is predicted. Obviously, I can't control the weather. I have

several options: I can do the walk in the rain, giving myself and my students the opportunity to experience different types of weather, the way the plants do. It's also usually delightfully less crowded in the park when it's raining. If it's terribly important, I can engage the spirits of the plants, because they have a lot to do with weather, and ask for their help holding off the rain for a bit. I'm careful not to overdo asking for what I call "weather favors." Understanding that effects ripple out, I remember that one person's sunny day in the park can result in a nearby farmer's crops being deprived of needed rain.

I can also cancel or reschedule the walk. I can do this graciously, even joyously, trusting change—nature's unexpected plan—or I can feel victimized and annoyed at my lack of control in the matter. That attitude keeps me stuck in the "if only it didn't have to rain" refrain, and frustrated, or worried about the money I didn't make. Or, struggling to understand why it had to happen this way, I get locked out of the present moment. I have exercised every option I've listed here at one time or another. The last one—feeling annoyed and victimized—didn't feel like an option at the time, but it was actually a choice.

Engaging the elements and the plants to influence the weather is a natural outgrowth of developing and remembering a deeper communion with nature. The most familiar story of working with the weather is the call for rain, the rain dance. There are many ways of calling rain—singing, dancing, and playing rattles and shekeres are some of the most common methods. One person alone can do this, but the combined energies of a group of people with one focused intent is most effective.

We were in the middle of a deep drought a few summers ago. I was house-sitting in New Hampshire and became acutely aware of the parched earth underneath me, the trees losing their leaves, the garden plants withering, and the thirsty wildlife looking for water in ponds and streams that had dried up. The feeling of thirst all around me began to feel unbearable, as personal and acute as my own dry skin and chapped lips. I wished that there were something I could do.

"How do I know I can't?" was the thought that came to me. I hadn't tried to do anything. My magical friend, Estherelke, had visited me here when I first arrived and had come bearing a wonderful gift—a four-foot-long rain stick from Mexico, reputed to be used by shamans there for calling rain. I went inside the farmhouse to get it. I loved being out there alone with the animals,

the woods, the open sky, and the bullfrogs. I picked up the rain stick and went back outside, gingerly turning it over, releasing a cascade of sounds of rushing water as thousands of tiny pebbles traveled down through the three-inch-diameter, round, hollow stalk of bamboo. I decided I would call a sacred circle, playing the rain stick to the seven directions, asking and thanking each element for rain. I would start there, and then do whatever came to and through me. I intuitively knew I had to *feel* rain.

As I walked to the East to begin, I took off the few clothes I was wearing in the intense heat. I was behind the house in the large backyard, invisible to the outside world. The place itself was remote. It's rare for a woman to feel safe enough alone outside to take off all her clothes. I relished my freedom, but I was sweating. I had to do this and get out of the hot sun.

I faced the East and gradually found a rhythm of turning the rain stick in a slow loop-de-loop of figure eights, the sign of infinity. I'd bring it up my left side and around and down on a diagonal across my body toward the earth, and then loop up and around my right side and down diagonally again across my middle. It felt good, hypnotic. I moved my body, swaying slowly at first, then letting it become dancing, humming, music. As I went around to create a circle, playing to the different directions and elements, I began to hear/create a song. It was a plea that went on and on with many different verses naming the lives that were dependent on the rain. Parts of the song went like this:

Rain Song[2]

Oh, Spirits of East (South, West, North, Below, Above, the Center),
Won't you please send some rain?
The plants need the rain
And the people need the rain
We all need the raiiiiiin
We all need the raiiiiiin
The deer need the rain and
The land needs the rain and
The finches need the rain and
The frogs need the raiiiiiiin

We all need the raiiiiin

We all need the raiiiiin

Our thanks for the raiiiiin

Our thanks for the raiiiiin!

Note: Repeat, replacing "East" with
"South/West/North/Below/Above/The Center"

I don't know how much time went by. I'd gone into a trancelike state, the plaintive chant taking me deeper and deeper into feeling the moisture, the wetness, the waters coming and giving life, the rain. I finally finished my ceremony and realized I felt more humidity in the air. There were even a few clouds. Within a few minutes, it began to sprinkle. Then it rained and rained, oh-so-lightly, all over the area that I could see.

I rejoiced as I wondered how widely the rain was falling. I threw my arms up and yelped with glee. I jumped around, turning in circles with my arms outspread. And then I felt very, very quiet, and stood still listening to the sound of raindrops kissing the earth. My heart was so moved. I felt so grateful. I put on my clothes and walked around to the front of the house. It was raining there too, and on the frog pond across the road. I wasn't sure if it was raining out in the dry yellow meadow beyond. It lasted about fifteen wonderful minutes, and I'd learned it could be done. I knew if I could do it, anyone could do it. If a group of people call for rain together, it surely works even better.

The secret is to remember that you are rain, and you are calling a part of yourself.

The next night I felt lonely and telephoned a friend, a talented writer and astrologer who lived in farm country in upstate New York. As we were talking, we complained about the discomforts of the hot, muggy weather, and I decided to tell her about my experience. She astounded me by telling me she, too, had spontaneously done a rain dance the day before.

"Had you ever done that?" I asked her.

"Never," she answered. "You?"

"Me neither," I confirmed.

"Wow, that's synchronistic. Maybe there was some sort of auspicious rain moment we hooked into."

"And maybe the fact that both of us were doing this helped each of our rains fall," I added. And then I realized I didn't know that. "Did it rain where you were?" I asked.

"Yes, it did. It rained lightly for about twenty minutes, and I'm not sure, but I think it was generally just a bit wider-spread than my immediate area."

We'd coaxed some reluctant rain for our lands, hundreds of miles apart, at almost the same time on the same day. Neither of us had set out to prove anything, to "master" the weather. That kills real magic, or more precisely, makes it hide underground. We desperately, passionately wanted it to rain. And we'd decided to see if we could help. We'd engaged the elements, each in her unique way, and it worked. It was that simple, mysterious, and true.

Simple Practices for Engaging Mystery

You do practices as needed to develop your magical intuition, your sense of the sacredness and connectedness you share with other forms of life, and to help you bring awareness of mystery into everything you do. These practices, along with the chakra practices (see this page–this page), help you learn to focus and use your own creative magic until every breath becomes part of your engagement with Sacred Mystery, and you are experiencing Healing Magic every moment of your life.

QUICK CLOUD READING

- Sit wherever you are outside, or even if you are a passenger in a car or on a train or bus, and do a quick cloud reading. What do you see? Who or what does it make you think of?

SLOW CLOUD READING

- Lie on your back on the earth (on a tatami mat, yoga mat, or towel, if you like) and look up at the sky. Read the clouds. Let the images you see evoke connections in your mind. Create a stream of thoughts (consciousness). Let the formations stir your imagination and tell you a story. It will be a true story.

TAROT IMAGES TO SPARK INTUITION

- Develop your intuition by looking at a Tarot card or other divination-deck card, and speaking aloud (you can do it quietly when you're by yourself), saying the meanings it suggests to you. You could also do a timed writing practice (as described in the practice "Communing with Plants and Trees" on this page) to let your intuition regarding the images on the card flow onto the page. When you're done, read it aloud. See if you have insight about how it benefits you to have drawn that card.

TOUCHING DEATH

- Sit in a cemetery—if possible, one in which any of your ancestors are buried. Remember that you, too, will die. Reflect on the naturalness of this fact, the mysterious miracle of it.

TOUCHING BIRTH

- Sit in a healthy, growing garden. Remember that you were born. Reflect on the naturalness of this fact, the mysterious miracle of it.

SACRED SILENCE

- Spend some time in silence, with no books, television, journals or recorded music. It doesn't matter whether you are in the country or the city. Start with a small amount of time (perhaps ten minutes) and work your way up to—an hour a day, one hour a week, one afternoon a week? Silence reveals how noisy it usually is inside our heads. The more you practice, the more silence you will actually experience. Mystery will reveal itself to you. What is required is for you to be available. This practice can really help with making yourself available.

A WRITING EXERCISE

- Write a personally meaningful, difficult, or confusing question down with your usual writing hand, and answer it with your other hand. Write for at least ten minutes.

You will find another part of yourself revealed, and have access to new and different information. By "confusing" yourself physically so that you need to engage extra concentration simply to write, a sharper intuitive clarity that comes from a deeper place than your intellect will often emerge in your consciousness.

THE REALM OF DREAMS

- Record your dreams or dream fragments in a journal. Make an initial commitment to do this for at least one month. This practice will also reveal parts of yourself that you may be less familiar with. Explore them with an open mind.

Some people think only experts can interpret dreams. Try free-associating with the image or images you remember. See what stories you come up with. You will grow more intuitive by familiarizing yourself with your own dream landscapes and language over time. When the first month is completed, consciously choose whether or not to continue this practice.

When you do remember dreams, you have to give your dream-life time, the same way that you have to give time to your "regular" life. Dreams offer opportunities to experience your multidimensional existence, and they reveal different layers of your consciousness. They can sometimes evoke uncomfortable feelings. They can also add richness to your life and your sense of yourself. This deepens your experiences, both in the day and at night.

If you don't remember your dreams there are simple practices that can help.

- Decide to be a dream-buddy with someone. To begin, tell each other your dream(s) at least once a week. Twice a week is even better. It can be anyone you feel close to. My mother and I used to share our dreams with each other. Whomever you choose, once you start to share dreams with each other, you will grow even closer, more intimate.

The best way to cultivate your dream recall and dream life is to have someone you know and trust waiting to hear your dreams.

- If you feel more comfortable with a stranger, and you have the money or insurance to afford it, choose a therapist who is gifted at interpreting dreams and working with you at discovering how your dreams can be

your teachers. A therapist can help you recognize your own psyche and introduce you to your dream vocabulary so you can continue to work together, on your own, or with a friend.

- When you are in bed at night, getting sleepier and sleepier, tell yourself again and again that you will remember your dreams and write them down when you wake up. Imagine yourself, as clearly as you can, waking up and remembering and writing down at least one dream.
- Keep your journal, or a special dream journal, next to your bed. Ideally, put it where you don't even have to take your head off your pillow to reach it and your pen.
- Record your dreams in a distinct color in your regular journal. Or mark them in some other specific, eye-catching way.

I always write DREAMS and put a big, bold circle around the heading before writing down what I remember. Then, when I want to, I can flip back through my journal and see what connections exist over time between my dreaming life and my daily life. The more you study them, the more you will learn the language of your inner life, and know how to heed warnings and receive advice that comes to you through your dreams. Remember, dreams are journeys into other dimensions of your being, and in that sense they are very real.

- Wake up without an alarm clock whenever possible. Stay in bed for a while after you wake up. Pay attention to your thoughts, pictures, dream fragments. Don't talk right away.
- Here's a method taught in Silva Mind Control for help remembering dreams: Drink half a glass of water at night just before bed while affirming, "I'm going to have a dream. I will remember my dream when I wake up. If I don't remember it right away, when I drink the other half of this glass of water, I will remember my dream and write it down." Drink the other half glass of water right away when you wake up, but move as slowly as possible to stay in a sleepy state, closer to dreams. This method will usually work. The key that opens the door is deciding that you can and will remember your dreams and allowing the pre-sleep suggestion to help you. Dreams are related to the Water element, too.

- If you wake up remembering your dream, but it fades and disappears out of conscious reach again, put your head on your bed or pillow as close as possible to the exact position it was in the moment you woke up. This is remarkably helpful for prodding conscious memory to recall at least one dream you were having when you woke up, and one dream remembered often leads to another.

NIGHT-SKY GAZING

- Look up at the star-filled night sky, and let yourself wonder about your place in the vastness of the cosmos. You are literally formed out of the same stuff as stars. Go flying through the solar systems in your imagination. Pick out your guiding star.

BECOMING ONE WITH ANYTHING

Learn how, or more accurately, remember how to respectfully merge your consciousness/awareness with as many species as possible—trees, stones, animals, birds, rivers.... Use your breath, your physical senses, and your imagination. Trees and plants are great to start with. They are really friendly and cooperative, for the most part, and easy to touch since they tend to stay in one place. The key is a willingness to slow down and be present to the relationship you share with other living beings on the earth.

BECOMING ONE WITH A TREE

- Stand or sit with your back against a tree. If you feel safe, close your eyes. If you don't feel safe (in a city park, for example), "soften" your vision so that your eyes are open yet totally relaxed, so that you're still aware of your surroundings though not focused on them. Breathe in and out with awareness; slow down. Exhale and feel the tree inhaling. Inhale, knowing you are taking in the oxygen that the tree is exhaling. Breathe. Feel. Introduce yourself. Listen.

- Then, imagine yourself being the tree. Send roots down into the earth. Feel rain soaking your bark, sap rising inside your trunk. Perhaps a bird lands on you and begins building a nest inside your foliage, or a squirrel runs lightly along the length of one of your branches, or a deer lies down

and curls up to sleep in your shade. Feel the wind touching your leaves, making them dance in the breeze. Imagine warm air and sunlight causing your flowers to open and emit their sweet fragrance into the air. Moonlight shines on you at night. Lift your arms into the air like strong branches. Imagine the feeling of being hugged by a human being, or scratched by a cat sharpening her claws on you, or being outside, roots in the earth, during a nearby thunder-and-lightning storm.

COMMUNICATING WITH A STONE OR CRYSTAL

- Hold a stone or crystal in your left hand. Place your right hand over it. Breathe and relax until you begin to feel, hear, or sense a pulse in the stone, then until the stone itself seems to disappear. Ask questions. Stones are memory-keepers, and they always have stories to tell.

COMMUNICATING WITH BIRDS AND ANIMALS

- Bring your attention to the birds and animals around you. Which ones do you notice the most? Stop and see what messages may be there for you. Sing, hum, and/or whistle to birds and animals. (This can be done with any form of life including plants, trees, stones, or insects.) Speak to them, silently or out loud. Notice how they listen. Practice listening, too, whether the "language" you are learning to hear is composed of sound, movement, color, location, or energy. Trust your intuition.

This practice encourages you to recognize and respond to your nonhuman relatives. It helps deepen your respect for all living creatures and helps the wildlife come to know you, too. Stories abound regarding the mysterious love that unites people and other living creatures.

One field biologist wrote a funny story about diligently searching for the meaning of why every species of local bird was congregating en masse in one tree nearby. She finally realized that they had come together to observe her, the new human in the neighborhood! One of my other favorites is of a woman who carefully covered the tracks of a mountain lion to keep local hunters from becoming aware of her presence. The next day she discovered that overnight the mountain lion had come and covered her tracks with the same protective intent.

AN ANIMAL STORY

One spring some years back, I was holding a weekend retreat for a group of women in the Catskills. A huge bear came into the yard while we were all outside, up on the deck. Many of the women became frightened. I suggested we chant the "Ahhh" tone down to the bear. This is the tone that is connected with the heart center and universal love. We did. The 400- to 500-pound bear promptly lay fully belly-down on the earth. We were silently thrilled, and then I cracked a silly joke under my breath. The women laughed loudly though not unkindly. Unfortunately, the bear rose with a startled air and lumbered away. I cried with remorse at having unintentionally broken trust with the bear.

BIRD STORIES

The following happened during another retreat, held in a home on the banks of the Delaware River in Pennsylvania. We sang, danced, harvested herbs, and did yoga and ritual outside, around a marvelous willow tree in the center of the backyard. A golden eagle came and flew low through the yard just after we went inside on Saturday afternoon. That was the first time I had ever heard of this magnificent bird. One of the women studied raptors and identified it for us with great excitement. Over the course of the next day, several pairs of bald eagles came, flying low through the yard. I had always wanted to see an eagle in the wild. We had been blessed.

Another time, a gathering of ten to fifteen bald eagles flew directly over us low, slow, and attentive as we did yoga. The women were stunned, each grateful in her own way. I cried quietly. The only word I can use to describe the gift of their awesome presence and grace is "communion."

Some friends of one of the women had come to the area for an organized eagle-watching experience that weekend. They had been disappointed not to see any eagles! For a few years, bald eagles kept coming to the retreats, not only at this house, but wherever we gathered. One weekend we sadly gave up on seeing them, and then they showed up as we were getting into our cars to leave. A pair of bald eagles came to see us off, circling high up in the sky. That's Amazing Grace, to me.

A SNAKE STORY

It was Labor Day weekend. I was packing to move when a poisonous copperhead snake came into my two-room house. I saw it slither in through the open sliding-glass doorway and head behind the woodstove as I came out into the living room. I went back inside my bedroom looking for something to use for protection. I took a four-foot spiral length of dried wisteria vine off the wall where it was hanging as a decoration. It looked like a snake. My heart was pounding too fast the whole time, but I didn't want to call authorities or neighbors who would come and help by killing the snake. I came out with my talisman, shutting the bedroom door behind me to keep my cat safely inside.

I stood still as stone, holding the tall, flexible piece of vine in front of me, with the straight tip touching the floor and the spiraling part in my hands. I wondered what on earth I thought I could do with this if I needed to use it as a weapon. The snake came out from behind the woodstove and inched a bit closer. I started singing a song I made up on the spot. The snake stopped slithering and rose up off the floor, not ten feet from where I stood in the small cabin. It was large for a copperhead—almost three feet long!

I sang my heart out from deep in my belly, telling the snake how majestic she was, and how much I respected her. I pleaded with her to leave my house because I was terrified. I didn't want to feel that way, I explained, but I couldn't help myself. The snake came back down to the floor, turned around and left through the open doorway. I'd gotten in the habit of leaving it open about twelve inches for my cat to go in and out at her leisure.

I kept singing, stunned by what had just happened. After the snake had been gone about ten minutes, I let my cat out of the bedroom. Still fully charged with adrenaline, I ventured into the doorway to peek outside. The snake was very close by. Only when I sang gently and softly, standing almost in the doorway as I sang my thanks for her coming, did she slowly, slowly go away.

The dirt road down our mountain was once called the Copperhead Highway. Few copperheads had been seen around the area, though, for some years. We just had large, black snakes that are not poisonous; in fact, the biggest one I've ever seen made its home right beneath my ground-level deck, just outside the door. As soon as I moved up there, I encountered copperheads on my hikes, walking down the mountain, and on the road with my apprentices. The first one I ever saw was coiled up in my driveway for hours, in the pouring rain, at night.

"Very unusual," I was told. Right away my friend Daphne said, "What are all these snakes trying to protect you from?"

"Protect me?" I asked, puzzled.

"Yes," she replied firmly, "especially the poisonous ones."

I was living in the woods again, for the first time in almost twenty years, and to me it was paradise. However, though I tried to ignore it (when I wasn't protesting against it), my cabin was less than five miles away from the Indian Point nuclear power plant.

My first beloved cat died young, wasting away five months after the two of us had moved up from the city. My current cat and I had both gotten incredibly ill living here. All three of us had been healthy when we arrived.

I loved this place, but I was leaving to regain our health. I didn't think I would live long if I stayed here. I knew my cat wouldn't. I was packing to leave in two weeks, and had felt sad and lonely all night. I felt that no one there would miss me.

The snake sent me the message that she had come to say goodbye, and to tell me that all the wildlife there would miss me. I cried in relief and gratitude, wonder and amazement at this mysterious experience.

Had the snakes really been coming around to warn me of the danger of living so close to the radioactive poison from the nuclear power plant? I think so.

My cat and I are both well now. It took a few years. The dried wisteria vine hangs in a window in my new house. It is still a beautiful decoration. Now it is also a reminder of mystery.

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2 The sheet music for this chant can be found in the appendix on page 221.

PART THREE

Moon Magic and Women's Wisdom

I love the moon. She is peaceful *and* exciting, and undeniably beautiful as she spirals around the blue-green Earth inviting the oceans to dance. Life evolved out of the oceans, and the tides rise

and fall stirred by the lunar cycle of light and dark. What on Earth could be as magical as the moon?

Women! We follow the moon's ancient cycle of waxing and waning with our bellies and breasts. They swell and recede together in menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause. Women birth life and death. Our bodies are guided, evocatively, like the ebbing, flowing ocean tides. Perhaps all women love the moon.

I remember reading a novel, as a pre-teen, about a woman who slept with the light of the full moon shining on her each month. I knew instantly that I wanted to do that, to connect with moon magic and the energy and mystery of the night. I wanted to grow up to be a woman who took moonbaths. It seemed very sexy, even though I was aware that it wasn't considered quite normal.

I was a little frightened of the warning that sleeping under the full moon could drive a person to lunacy. But, despite all the negative or, at best, mixed cultural messages I had internalized about the dangerously unpredictable ("like a woman"?) effects of the moon, I somehow knew that being affected by the cycles of the moon was a good thing. I didn't truly understand how natural this was to me as a menstruating woman, yet I was intuitively inviting her magic and mystery to flow through me, so that I, too, would shine like the bright, silver moon.

Lunar/Menstrual Rhythms

Women's connection to the mystery of the life force is innate. It lives in our bodies, and is expressed through the cycles of menstruation, motherhood, menopause, and beyond. These are the women's blood mysteries.

When we live close to nature, women naturally cycle with the moon, ovulating under full moon light and menstruating at the dark, new moon. The disruptions caused by artificial light, certain electromagnetic frequencies and, most ominously, the plethora of hormones we consume through contemporary chemicals in plastic, food, and medicine, cause fewer and fewer women to ovulate and bleed with the rhythms of natural light anymore. Being out of sync with our natural lunar rhythms and with other women has contributed to women's illnesses, from menstrual cramps to reproductive-system cancers.

However, interestingly enough, when you put a group of women close together in a school, work, or living situation, most dormitories, offices, or women's gatherings will soon be regulated by their own group "lunar cycle." All the women begin to bleed around the same time.

Reuniting consciously with the moon's cycle can help any woman know herself better. Respecting her rhythms and cycles—so like the waxing and waning of the moon—a woman remembers how to love her own body in all its sexual and rhythmic metamorphoses. Please be assured that a woman who has given up her womb to surgical treatment, at any age, still holds her sacred energy and deep female wisdom within her body.

We have been taught untruths about our bodies. We are told lies that we are unclean, that we are impure, that our red, flowing presence contaminates. What could be further from the truth than this? We women birth humanity. Our blood is healing. It is lifeblood, not the same blood that flows out of your veins if you're mortally wounded. Menstrual blood is the nutrient-rich substance that forms and nourishes new life.

When it is not creating life, this sacred substance flows down from between our legs each month for many years, and yet we do not die. We stand in the doorway between life and death, and most of us are naturally at our most intuitive, visionary, and creative just before and during our menstrual bleeding. Years later, when we achieve menopause after birthing children or other creations with our fertile energies, we are invited to come into our full expression as women of power.

A woman's cyclical transformations continue throughout her physical life as she goes through the life cycle stages of Maiden, Mother, and Crone.

She begins as:

She who is born with the eggs of future generations already in her ovaries, and grows into:

She who bleeds from between her legs every month and does not die, becoming:

She who can birth new life and make milk out of her own body, and who must create—though not necessarily a child—and then matures into the full expression of herself as a woman of power:

She who holds her wise blood within, circulating and using that potent creative energy as she sees fit.

Women are the "mothers of the creative force," a phrase I first learned from Native American Wise Women. Phases of the moon and rhythms of the oceans' tides move inside us, within our bellies. Moon goddesses the world over, from Ix Chel to Artemis, teach women to honor their bodies as sacred.

You can, for example, come to experience your increasingly rounded premenstrual or menopausal belly as waxing like the moon. You can honor your belly and yourself as big and round rather than merely judging your condition as "bloated" or "fat." Let yourself take up space. You can see yourself as embraced by the full moon when you are round with pregnancy, and also when you are laboring on a creative project. You mother it, feeding it with your time, money, and passionate devotion as you would mother your child with the blood of your womb and the milk of your breasts when you are pregnant or nursing.

The blood mysteries of menarche, menstruation/mothering, and menopause are tidal. Remembering your relationship with these natural, rhythmic cycles in ritual and everyday life brings you home to your body. This is psychically and physically healing. A woman can sense that the waning, emptying to dark moon, is allied with her own menstrual bleeding time. She can come to feel her menstrual cycle as magical, rather than as a drag, a curse, or nothing special. Premenstrual syndrome is a condition that arises, in part, from not understanding the sacredness of menstruation and the acute psychic receptivity that comes with it.

A woman is at her most naturally psychic and magically potent just before and during her menstrual period. She is both vulnerable and powerful, standing open and receptive in the doorway between life and death. A woman can come to understand that her "moontime" (menstrual period) is "*her* time of the month," for visioning and replenishing herself, alone or with other women. A woman who takes time to do this will find herself rewarded with increased mental, emotional, and sexual/reproductive health and with increasingly sharper intuitive and magical skills.

The theory that women are unsuitable for leadership several days a month still holds women back from positions of authority in many areas. I counter that including the reality of women's bodies and psyches could be exactly what's needed to improve the quality of our institutions, to help important decisions be made, with time out for thought and reflection and more genuine communication. I enjoy imagining sacred, magical "moon rooms" being

designated in government buildings to call upon the special visionary capacities of menstruating women, guided by the crones.

The lack of honoring and understanding of women's wisdom has caused great imbalances in our societies—rape of women and the earth, and a pathological view of women's bodies and natural processes—to the detriment of all. The re-incorporation of women's traditional, cyclical wisdom into all aspects of life and all forms of leadership—civic, economic, medical, and spiritual—is absolutely essential. Healthy female energy is needed to reweave peace and justice in the world and to nourish and reclaim Healing Magic as a central part of our daily lives.

It is during her postmenopausal years, when a woman holds her wise blood within, circulating as energy, that she can best use her gifts of knowing to help guide her community. Those years are, or can be, about expanding to encompass and surpass all that she has been before, rather than being an undesirable life passage to be denied, hidden, and warded off. Elder women, called crones as a title of respect, were the traditional leaders of their communities for tens of thousands of years. When misogynistic historians rewrote the history of the world, this was forgotten.

Postmenopausal women have traditionally had a particular responsibility to guide their communities as elders. They were the doctors, midwives, and healers. They were the judges, counselors, and teachers. They were the wise women who helped bring us into the world and helped ease us out of it. They were the arbitrators and mediators of ethical and moral questions. They were the inventors. They held the sacred stories of their people. Old women have "come a long way, Baby," from such positions of loving involvement and authority in the community to being cast aside, overmedicated, into nursing homes and worse.

There is an old saying: "A nation isn't conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground." Women have been beaten way down in the past five thousand years, much more overtly in some places and cultures than others. But "A woman's power is so sacred, it can't be fought for; it can only be uncovered," according to Cherokee/Tsalagi wise woman Dhyani Ywahoo, founder of the Sunray Meditation Society. I understand this to mean that, though women's rights and protection can and must be fought for, power—your inner freedom and personal authority—is something you must own for yourself.

Women used to know everything we needed to know about our menstrual cycles, our cycles of fertility for conception and contraception, about menopause, and beyond. We knew about healing illness, about birthing and dying. The elder women guided the girls into knowing, loving, and taking care of their bodies. They helped and guided the people through all the great transitions of life. To this day the clan mothers of the Haudenosaunee Native nations in New York pick their people's male chief. They have the ultimate authority to impeach him, too, if he has been warned and continues not to act in the best interests of the people. (The Haudenosaunee are also known as the Iroquois or Six Nations confederacy, comprised of the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and Tuscarora nations. This confederacy was influential in the creation of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, though apparently the founding fathers couldn't grasp—or ignored—the importance of the clan mothers in the government.)

We women need to claim the authority of our individual and collective wisdom and experience, the reality of our magic, and the power of our raised voices, saying yes to that which supports life and no to all that supports indiscriminate destruction. We can use our authentic voices and our ability to vision, to become a stabilizing yet transformative force for a world in major flux. When cultivated and developed, women's moon magic matures into a profoundly life-enhancing, additional dimension of women's intelligence and women's wisdom.

Some matrilineal Native nations consider all women medicine women because we menstruate. Innate knowing of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life forms—what Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hahn calls "interbeing"—guides women to naturally embrace inclusiveness, which is one of the keys to a healthy world. This doesn't mean that some men aren't more compassionate or visionary than some women; it isn't a contest. Women have been severely separated from our natural way of being in the world. Whoever and whatever you are, life is about loving yourself and cultivating and sharing your unique gifts for the benefit of us all.

Where I grew up there were no mountains or forests, but I could almost always find the moon. There was also a grandmotherly weeping willow in our small, suburban backyard that was my favorite tree. I loved to climb up and disappear behind the long, hanging branches. They created a flowing curtain of willow "hair" for me to hide behind. The tree received me with love.

Throughout the world, willows are linked to the moon and her waters, and they are sacred to goddesses of the moon such as Hecate, a Greek crone-goddess of the disappearing, dark moon.

Just as the waxing, crescent moon rebirths herself out of complete darkness each month, willow trees can regenerate themselves under almost any conditions, growing profusions of new shoots out of seemingly dead stumps. Willow stakes have even been known to turn back into trees long after being planted as fence posts! (Rupert Sheldrake tells a personal story about this in his introduction to *The Rebirth of Nature*.)

Loving the moon, to me at that time, meant loving the big, full moon. I didn't give much thought to the dark of the moon or any other phase of the lunar cycle, until I was an apprentice Green Witch taking part in my first New Moon ritual.

The New Moon is the dark moon. Magically, it is an auspicious time for new beginnings. The ritual itself was simple. We called a circle of the elements (see Part V) and meditated, and then each woman lit a candle to her stated intention. It seemed new and strange to me, but I liked it. Working magically and meditatively with the cycles of the moon connects you to the spiritual underpinnings of your life. It has been one of my most consistent practices for over fifteen years now. Marking the new and full moons as an ongoing spiritual practice alters how you experience time—transforms your relationship with it. You stop fighting against it so much. You perceive time as richer. It deepens and expands. Now is all there truly is.

Time itself is multidimensional; it seems to get more fluid and open as it is lived, rather than "killed" or passed or raced against. I haven't stopped making plans, and no one can be perfectly present at all times; but with attention, you begin to realize that you are always moving away from, or returning to, the present moment.

The New Moon and/or your own moontime is the perfect time to dream in the rich darkness, conceive a new beginning, and nurture a specific desire by planting a "vision seed." You form an intention in meditation, and commit to it by planting a symbolic seed in the fertile field of your imagination. You can feed your intent all month by consciously directing your attention and energy toward actions that support its manifestation. (See Moon Cycle Rituals, this page, and Simple Practices, this page.)

A few years after I had been introduced to this practice, a Jewish Brazilian woman came to one of my New Moon circles in Manhattan. She taught me that gathering together to meditate on the New Moon is part of my Jewish female ancestral tradition. "Rosh Chodesh," the Hebrew term for the new moon, is considered a festive, women's holiday. I was so surprised and delighted to learn that, and to know I am honoring the lives and spirits of my grandmothers and great-grandmothers, and all the women who've passed down through the matrilineal bloodline that led to my mother and me. (Menstrual blood is the only blood that actually gets passed down from parent to child, so it was the original and obvious "bloodline." This is perhaps why, in Judaism, a child is considered Jewish only if his or her mother is Jewish. The term was usurped, though, so that any inheritance would pass down the male "line" rather than through the female lineage.)

Everything that is perceived as female, including the moon, is currently seen as beautiful to gaze upon, at best, and dangerous and sinful to gaze upon, at worst, yet always as "other" than the "regular" male norm. Women are described as being the secondary human form, not the primary form from which all others are born and loved. Women have learned to perceive themselves through this lens too. Can you imagine, for example, men and women being comfortable with consistently referring to humanity as "womankind"? If not, then why is "mankind" acceptable?

A woman is said to have "extra" body fat, as opposed to a man being told he has a "less than usual" amount. If you refer to a squirrel in the park as "he," no one will notice. Try calling the squirrel "she" and people will ask you how you know. Maleness is assumed unless femaleness is obvious. There is an implication that male is the normal state of being, the ground out of which we all spring. Women's changing hormones, menstrual flows, and pregnancies are seen as making us unstable and more prone to illness, rather than as giving us innate access to primal knowing and particular strengths.

Women's womb wisdom and moon magic are innate and experiential. They are central to a woman's unique gifts and responsibilities in the world. They come from embodying the eternal mystery of the interrelationship between life, death, and rebirth. This special connection doesn't mean that biology is destiny in a limiting way, or that every woman must aspire to become a mother and grandmother. It means that women's inborn gifts enhance and inform all our endeavors.

Laboratory tests have shown that when heart cells are placed close together in a petri dish, they will begin to beat in unison, and so will uterine cells. When placed near one another, they pulse and cycle together as one. I think of the womb as a woman's second heart. It links her uniquely to the heart of Mother Earth and the moon. Women's wisdom is vital not only to each woman, but to the health of every living thing on Earth.

Reconnecting with the phases of the moon is important for men, too. Meditating with the moon helps men open to recover their own visionary capacities. The moon helps inspire their own male brand of compassionate and protective magic, and supports men in learning to appreciate and respect women's (womb) wisdom. Men, by definition, don't have womb wisdom, but they do have access to heart wisdom. That, too, is innate and shared by all beings. It can be encouraged and intentionally cultivated.

This is crucial. We all need to take responsibility for leaving behind our pathological approaches to battling between the sexes; men must be stopped from using their positions in the world to hurt, dominate, and rape women, privately and publicly. We must all help create options for women and men that go beyond survival mechanisms such as learning to wield power covertly and/or believing that in order to have power, we must give up kindness, vulnerability, and love.

Some people seem to think the answer is to create a new hierarchy where women step into the positions of power and control. This is not enough to change what needs changing. Real power doesn't need to control or dominate. Women cannot ask for permission, either. We need to claim our power directly and in our own way. We need to give death to outmoded forms, and we can do it without losing our compassion, remembering that it is in the nature of life to evolve toward the fullest possible expression of love.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés says:

> We are using the voices of our minds, our lives, and our souls to call back intuition, imagination; to call back the Wild Woman. And she comes. Women cannot get away from this. If there is to be change, we are it. We carry La Que Sabe, the One Who Knows. If there is to be inner change, individual women must do it. If there is to be world change, we women have our own way of helping to achieve it. Wild

> Woman whispers the words and the ways to us and we follow. *(Women Who Run With the Wolves*)

Like all talents and abilities, women's potent magic brings special responsibilities along with it. We women must reclaim this wisdom and teach it to our daughters. We must teach our sons to respect and protect women and girls. We cannot ask for anyone's permission, or look for external validation or male approval. Women must recognize the importance of what we feel, think, and know. We have to teach men, too—immediately—because we are meant to work together, and we are all needed.

We must all be willing to mature beyond the dying forms of relationship to which we are accustomed. Women and men can join together in healthy friendship and love, in both heterosexual and homosexual unions. We can engage our minds and hearts to envision and create magical relationships—humorous and serious, sexual and platonic, just and joyous, juicy partnerships. We can then use their power to nourish and support life on Earth. Reconnecting directly with the lunar rhythms stirs our creative imaginations toward solutions and ways to help each other, as we all grow into being who we are truly meant to be.

Men have come into new moon and full moon circles and have been deeply touched. They, too, like to meditate and have magical fun, to play and be free-spirited. They do not tend to share as easily or as vulnerably as the women. But then, as we all know, we are different. Men, like women, have been trained and conditioned by our divisive culture to believe and behave in certain ways that most men have not yet questioned. Men are more likely to choose to examine these things after being exposed to honest women's viewpoints and experiences.

People do extraordinary things every day, out of the understanding that we live best when we live in relationship with each other. I heard a story on public radio a few years ago about a man who was hired as the new director of a nursing home in Pennsylvania. He was heartsick when he saw the conditions in which the people there were working and living and dying. He implemented a radical change that was both practical and inspired. Solving some local space problems, a grade school was moved into an unused portion of the nursing home. Plants and animals were moved in, too.

People balked at the idea initially, but everyone benefited immensely. Dying elders found reasons to get up in the morning. The children had many teachers. Affectionate cross-generational friendships formed. The people and place began to thrive more than almost anyone had thought possible. The nursing home had been living down to its frozen image of itself as a place only for sick, old, dying people with nothing to gain, lose, or offer. Now it is living up to its potential because it has a new form. It is a place where love and life are allowed to happen, by accepting that life includes decay and death and a good life includes a multitude of good relations. Clearly this man was in touch with what some might call his female wisdom. Yes, and he listened to his own heart wisdom. Like women's womb wisdom, it is about compassionate, caring relationships.

Wherever life on Earth is considered sacred and good, women and the earthy, lunar wisdom we embody will be treasured. Holding women in high honor for the special gifts of our bodies is akin to honoring life itself.

The Charge of the Goddess

> I who am the Beauty of the Green Earth and the White Moon among the stars and the mysteries of the waters,
>
> I call upon your soul to arise and come unto me. I am the Soul of Nature that gives life to the universe.
>
> From me all things proceed and unto me they must return.
>
> Let my worship be in the heart that rejoices, for behold—all acts of love and pleasure are my rituals.
>
> Let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honor and humility, mirth and reverence within you. And you who seek to know me, know that your seeking and yearning will avail you not, unless you know the Mystery: for if that which you seek you find not within yourself, you will never find it without. For behold—I have been with you from the beginning, and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.
>
> **—Starhawk, The Spiral Dance**

Beginning about two thousand years ago, the leaders of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam became increasingly deadly in their determination to replace and

destroy the Great Goddess, primary deity of the world. This is when Healing Magic began to disappear from our daily lives.

All who worshiped the Goddess in the earth's abundance, the moon's cyclic rounds of life, death, and rebirth, and healthy sexual pleasure were subject to violent wrath. The women who were her priestesses were stripped of their authority and freedom. Ritual female genital mutilation, commonly though incorrectly called "female circumcision," began in Africa in the same period.

Since that time we have been taught to fear the night and darkness as if they are evil, to think of the moon and female sexual energies as mysterious problems that must be solved and controlled. These fears need to be thoroughly examined, and darkness redefined, so it can be welcomed back into our lives as the ally it truly is.

Women are reclaiming our intimate, personal connection with the rhythms of the moon, because our greatest personal freedom depends upon it. Self-knowledge, as women, reminds us that the truths of the moon mirror the truths of our bodies, which mirror the truth of our minds, hearts, spirits, and lives. The moon begins as dark, grows to fullness, and then disappears into total darkness again. Women, too, need to take time "in the dark" to replenish ourselves or we will continue to hide our true selves and withhold our most profound gifts.

We sleep in the dark. It is where we dream and replenish ourselves. Even our ideas need time to incubate, to germinate in the dark, before coming out into the light of day. We think of light/white as life, and dark/black as death. Yet, we form in the dark before we are born, and thousands of people who have died and been revived report seeing and being drawn toward a blindingly brilliant white light.

We begin our own growth in the deep comfort of darkness. We are formed over nine to ten moon cycles, floating in oceanic salt waters within the blood-rich blackness of our mother's womb. We plant seeds in pots of dirt or directly inside the earth's body. We bury them to bring them to life. Think about that! Like us, they need time in the dark before they are ready to come up and take new form in the sunlight. Even after they start sprouting in the open air, their growth continues under the ground. Roots grow down and out, clasping the earth to draw in essential nutrients. Dirt, our soil, is dark and feeds new life. Growth never moves in just one direction. It emanates out in all directions.

The moon is our celestial "night-light." She is a shape-shifter who stays close to the earth and guides us to follow her nocturnal rhythms of waxing and waning as she fills with light and empties into darkness again each month. The lunar cycle adds a different current to our lives than the solar cycle. It is deeper and more internal, a water rather than a fire cycle. The moon is a fluid anchor for our soul's journey. She is ever-present and ever-changing, cycling from dark new moon to waxing crescent (with the curve on the right, if you are in the Northern Hemisphere, or on the left in the Southern Hemisphere), to bright full moon, to waning crescent (now the light is curved to the left, if you are north of the equator, or to the right if south), to dark new moon.

The moon slowly fills up, then steadily pours forth her magical silver light, emptying herself to begin again. She shares her gifts, then takes a few days to herself before beginning to shine again. She shows us how to gather, share, and conserve energy. Dying and being reborn, the moon is a mirror for each of us of the cyclical nature of time. We have the opportunity to consciously begin a new cycle, and let go of or build upon the one that's ending, just as the moon does every month.

We have been taught to believe and act as if time moves in a linear progression, from beginning to middle to eventual end. We tend to think of our lives in terms of days, weeks, months, and years that stretch away in front of and behind us in one long, finite line. This is an illusion—and would be even if solar cycles were the only rhythms at work. The solar seasons—spring, summer, winter, and fall—come around the wheel of the year again and again. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west, creating the solar cycles of light and dark. Day follows night, and night follows each day. With luck, you continually come around to your birthday, year after year. In other words, solar time is not linear, either.

Yet we have been raised in a solar-oriented world, thinking in terms of the years passing in a linear progression. Days must be raced against because the older you get, the faster they seem to pass. Nights don't figure as prominently in our sense of time and timing. The moon reminds us that time also cycles in a lunar way—a female way that includes the nights. Time, too, fills up and empties, expands and contracts, begins and ends again with each complete lunation. The sun and moon offer us totally different rhythms to dance to, but we don't need to choose between them. Why dance to just one kind of music?

If you could look down on them from above the North Pole, the earth, sun, and moon all spiral in a counter-clockwise direction. The moon appears to spiral thirteen times around the earth to each single revolution of the earth around the sun. Solar and lunar energies move through everything on earth, up and down, in and out, physically and energetically. One of my favorite memories is of finding myself in between the moon and sun. I think that was the moment I realized I had always been in love with nature.

I was nineteen years old, far away from home for the first time, camping in the Sinai desert. It was nearly dawn, and I'd been up all night, again. I had found that I couldn't tear myself away from watching the stars gradually fade as daylight lit the sky bit by bit each morning. It amazed me that I could be right there watching it happen. I would wait up to watch the last stars "disappear" as the sky got bluer and bluer. On this morning, I saw the sunrise and the moonset across the sky from each other.

The sun was rising in the east, coming up over the Red Sea on my right. The full moon was setting in the west, going down over the red rock mountains to my left. I hadn't known that the sun and moon could be seen in the sky at the same time. I was in awe. It was spectacularly beautiful and electrifying. I kept looking back and forth between the distant mountains and the horizon, from the red, hot ball that was the rising sun to the soft, cool orb that was the setting moon. The last stars were still visible overhead as the sky turned from dark to light. I felt like I was standing in the magnificent, magical center of the universe.

Year after year, our contemporary clocks are first and foremost set around work and family/childcare, not the lunar or solar cycles of light and dark. We have disconnected from real time. Understanding the cyclical nature of time encourages the growth and evolution of your soul. It shifts how you approach your everyday goals, too. We've lived with the imbalance of separating our daily lives from our soul's truths and body's needs for so long, we find it difficult to recognize our problem for what it is.

Instead, we are puzzled as to why we suffer sleep disorders, mental disturbances, depression, exhaustion, anxiety, and many other mental and physical ailments and illnesses. Our children are sick and anxious, too. More and more potent and dangerous medications are being prescribed for us. Women are being directly hurt by all of this, and women's illnesses have come to be accepted as a normal part of life. Fibroid tumors, irregular menstrual

cycles, debilitating cramps, infertility, PMS, breast and reproductive cancers, hypertension, all of these and more have psychic as well as physical causes. We've forgotten the necessity of dreaming and visioning. We need to have time in our lives for intimate, personal connection with Moon Magic and with other women, too.

One of the first and most important things I gleaned from my teacher when I was an apprentice was to gather women together. Careful attention was given to creating a sense of safety, which women are sorely lacking. I watched and learned. I learned that women have amazing reserves of strength, nearly inexhaustible creativity, and a depth of heart-centeredness that is expressed uniquely in women's circles. It is inspirational. When women gather, magic happens.

Women have a tendency to "feel into" the people they are with—whose needs are being met, and whose are not. When women are together in a safe space, "doing what comes naturally," there is often such a palpable caring felt in the circle, it invites the heart to love. This is the crucial experience of being "allowed"—welcomed and encouraged—to speak our truths and be heard. Women care. We need to remember to take time to care for ourselves as utterly as we've cared for everyone else.

Current scientific research has now "proven" what has long been obvious: Women under stress tend to reach out to their friends rather than fitting into the classic, male, "fight-or-flight" response that is considered universal. The female version has been dubbed "tend and befriend." Women must have the vision and courage to bring their differences with them whenever they enter into positions of authority, rather than trying to fit into current hierarchal structures that are crumbling. I've watched male spiritual students strive for visionary experiences that are naturally available to every menstruating woman. I've seen sincere male leaders work diligently to develop the kind of compassion that is a natural and underrated gift of mothers in their everyday lives.

It can be difficult when you first try to weave the magic you've recovered in a women's circle into what already exists, what is thought of as "the real world." As we support each other, we find we hold an enormous reservoir of creative ideas and talents just waiting to be drawn from to bring more beauty into everyday life. According to astrologer Sandra Pastorius, "It will be our

joyful acts of participation in the sorrows of the world that bring a healing balm to our ailing planet."

Women, like the moon, resonate with the magic of creation. Our shapes, sounds, textures, and smells archetypically remind us of our own magical beginnings—of being carried near our mother's heart inside her womb, coming out through the wet, flowing opening of her vagina, being fed from the abundance of her breasts. Even if you were delivered by caesarean section, or not breast-fed, in the "science-is-better" years, it is a short blip in the cellular memory you carry of mothers birthing and infants nursing throughout time.

All forms of life come from the Great Mother, just as our human ancestry has been traced back over 150,000 years to one African woman. Human mothers birth both daughters and sons, and all humanity shares a genetic heritage through mitochondrial DNA that is passed down only through mothers. No matter what you may have read or heard about Athena springing full-grown out of Zeus's head, or Eve being born from any part of Adam's anatomy, or about a woman being an empty vessel for a man's determining seed, it just doesn't work that way biologically. Sex/gender is actually far more fluid than predetermined, and we remain undetermined for quite some time when we're still inside the womb. Unless we specifically become a male due to a genetic factor from the Y chromosome, we will be born female. (A variety of other chromosomal arrangements can occur, too; there will therefore always be a range of possible genders.)

I remember when I first read that a woman can physically feel when she ovulates. I was furious that no one had ever taught me how to be aware of this. I began paying closer attention to my physical sensations, and counting thirteen days back from my first day of menstruation, to learn to detect "that magic moment." I was also introduced to a fictional presentation of lunaception—working with the light and dark phases of the moon cycle to influence fertility. I knew immediately, intuitively, that this was based in reality.

Women are most fertile at the full moon. A woman who is having trouble getting pregnant will often benefit from sleeping in total darkness except for three nights in the middle of her cycle when she sleeps with a small light on. Better yet, she can sleep in the moonlight. It can also work the other way around. I eventually took my newfound consciousness of when I was ovulating

and mentally coaxed my cycle to shift and change over time until I was ovulating on the new moon, the least naturally fertile time, and bleeding on the full moon. I intuited that if working with the cycles of the moon could help a woman conceive, the moon might help me with natural contraception, too. She did just that for many years. Now I'm in the beginnings of menopause with ever-changing cycles—one month on, two months off—and seemingly random patterns being the new norm. Mental coaxing doesn't seem to interest my cycle at all these days!

In the days before even telegrams or telephones were common, female intuition was more trusted. It was a valued source of information, particularly for mothers. Among other things, this was one way a mother could keep an eye (psychically) on her loved ones, especially when they were far away. A favorite story in my family tells how my Great-Grandmother Esther saved my Great-Uncle Mac's life during World War II. He was in a foxhole with his buddies, and tried to light his cigarette. Though he kept trying, he couldn't get the match to light. Then he became keenly aware of a sense of his mother's presence with him. He told his buddies not to smoke just then either. The men in the next trench were shot right after that, when they betrayed their position by holding matches to their cigarettes.

Though not always so dramatically, doesn't it often seem that inexplicable forces are at work in our lives? Mother love is certainly a potent natural force in our universe. We need to remember and trust that we are intrinsically part of this larger universe of mysterious, guiding energies. As Starhawk writes in her novel, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, "Working Magic is the craft of remembering how to align ourselves with the natural energies of our universe and to trust our lives." Intuitive knowing is simply having knowledge whose origins you are unable to explain. You don't know how you know. The more open you are to being in relationship with the magic of the moon and the larger universe, the more intuitive knowing you experience. In the case of the moon, I think it is intuitive wisdom and ancient memory, and whether ancient memory comes from other lives or is held in your cellular memory or in your energy field, it is valuable knowledge.

Meditation/Trance Journey

The following meditative journey can help you develop your magical intuition and deepen your trust in your own inner wisdom.

JOURNEYING TO YOUR SACRED CAVE OF INNER WISDOM

Sit or lie in a comfortable position and bring your attention to your breathing. First, simply observe your breath, flowing in and out, gently and rhythmically, like the waters of the ocean lapping against the shore, in ... and out ... in ... and out. Relax, and allow your breathing just to be what it is, not looking to make anything happen.

Let your breath naturally begin to slow and deepen.... Notice that as you exhale completely, your next breath flows in automatically. Open to let the breath of life breathe you. Feel free to move, adjusting yourself in any way you may need to, in order to feel comfortable. As you grow more relaxed, you may find tensions that you've been holding. Staying in a quiet place mentally and physically, gently shift your body until you are as comfortable as you can be.

Now look, and you will see that there is a beautiful spiral path that goes up and down the center of your self, the center of your being. It is your unique spiral path, and it may be made of anything—stone steps, tree roots, water, rainbow lights.... Whatever it is made of, step onto your spiral path in perfect love and perfect trust, and find yourself beginning to spiral effortlessly, down and around and inward. Travel down, around, and inward ... down, around, and inward, traveling toward your own sacred cave of inner wisdom.

Spiral down, toward the center of your Self, down into the womb of the earth—ancient blue-green mother of us all—down, around, and in. Traveling down, spiral 'round toward your own sacred cave of inner wisdom. When you have come as far down the spiral as you will come for now (your cave is a vast inner space with countless levels, chambers, entrances, and exits), find yourself at the entrance to your sacred cave. Go inside....

There is a feeling of familiarity here, a feeling of ... home. Breathe in home.... Allow home to fill your heart, mind, body, and soul. This is your sacred space, your sacred cave of inner wisdom. This cave is yours, and it looks however your cave looks. It may be light or dark. It may be rocky or moss-covered. There may be water in your cave—a spring, a lake, a river. There may be crystals embedded in the walls. It may be furnished.... It is your cave. Take your time, and enjoy and explore the sights, sounds, smells, textures, and

tastes here. How does the air in your cave taste? Do you hear sounds? Is it silent? What is the ground like under your feet? How does it feel? Are you barefoot? Are there plants in your cave? Trees? Animals? Birds?

Your Wise Woman lives in this cave, and you begin to become aware of her presence now. Whether you see her or feel her, whether she looks like you or someone you know, or even if she has no form at all, you know her by the sense of absolute love and compassion she has for you. She knows you through and through, and she loves you with your strengths and weaknesses, secrets and shames—without question. She is wise beyond words, and she is glad you've returned here to be with her, to call on her. She can and will help you with anything. But first ...

Open yourself to receive the deeply compassionate love that flows from her to you. Drink it in, and let it nourish all the places in you that have been hurt, hidden, and unwelcome. Let this unconditional acceptance heal the rejections you've suffered from others and from yourself. There are no conditions to be met here. Allow yourself to receive this love as fully as you can. It is enough just to be.... It is enough just to be.... It is enough just to be....

You can choose to bring your meditation to completion now or go on to explore anything you need or want to with your Wise Woman. You can ask for her insight regarding an illness you have, or a situation in which you feel stuck, or for guidance choosing your New Moon intent. Let her help you go deeper into the dream within the dream, and retrieve wisdom that you can put into practice when you resurface.

When you feel complete, thank your Wise Woman and say goodbye in whatever way feels right. Let her go back into the deeper recesses of your cave to hold this sacred space for you at all times. Make your way out through the cave traveling the same route that you took to come in. Enjoy each step along the way as your feet connect with this home ground you hold within yourself. Go out the same opening through which you entered your cave.

Step back onto the spiral path in perfect love and perfect trust.

Gravity doesn't work quite the same way here, so you find yourself traveling effortlessly up the spiral path. Spiraling up and around and outward ... up and around and outward ... traveling up out of the depths of your sacred cave, up through Mother Earth, slowly spiraling up and around, up and around, and out toward the surface. Feel your essence come spiraling up through the surface of the earth, re-entering your body through the bottoms of your feet as it begins to return into every cell of your body. It moves up from your feet through your ankles and calves, into your knees and thighs, hips and buttocks.

Feel your pelvis, your genitals, and all your internal organs alive with this newly energized life force that continues spiraling through your entire torso. It moves through your belly and breasts and upper chest, up your spine and all through your back. It slides across your shoulders and down your upper arms and armpits, elbows, forearms, wrists, and hands. Feel the energy spiral up through your neck, throat, and head, waking your senses as it touches your mouth, nose, eyes, and ears. Feel it tingling as it moves through your scalp and hair. Let your essence fill your veins and arteries, nourish your blood and bones, vibrate through your skin, and shine all around you as your healthy aura, connecting you with all that is.

Ground yourself by consciously breathing in and out, and feel your physical body sitting or lying wherever you are. Take your time. When you are fully back in your body, open your eyes. Write down anything that you want to remember from your journey. No matter how clear it is in the moment, or even how little you think happened, writing it down or drawing something is almost always helpful, clarifying, and illuminating.

Enjoy your next step, whatever it is.

Moon Cycle Rituals

The meditation above is also available on a CD I wrote and recorded called *Moon Meditations*. It can be listened to twice a month to help you put an intention into practice, guided by the cycles of the moon.

The idea of setting a goal based upon the timing of a celestial body's orbit isn't completely unfamiliar in modern Western society. We are encouraged to make resolutions every New Year's Eve. The basis of a New Year's resolution is

the earth's annual trip around the sun, arbitrarily set as beginning on January 1 and ending on December 31 each solar year.

When you have a goal, an intention, a vision, and/or a dream that you consciously wish to encourage into form, you work with every cycle of the moon's fertile energies, beginning, ritually, during the dark New Moon. Form an intention at the New Moon, and plant the seed of that intent in the darkness, in the fertile field of your imagination, fed by the rich soil of your desire.

Your New Moon intent can be about anything. I have learned that it is best to make it as specific and focused as possible. This makes it easier for the universe to help you. It should be something realizable, rather than something not humanly possible. For example, "I'm going to affirm myself when I'm criticized at work" might be a more realizable, though still challenging intent than "this month I'm going to be open and loving at all times." Or perhaps it might be to do yoga, or whatever practice you do, for five minutes a day, if you think you "should" do it one hour a day, but never do and consistently use that as a reason to put yourself down. It could be to risk expressing anger, or to be gentle to yourself, or to take a candlelight bath once a week; or you could choose to let go of a specific expectation that keeps you from being present to what is.

In other words, you can take a specific area of challenge and address it, or simply choose something you want to practice doing. Ask the energy of the waxing and waning moon to aid you in focusing and making real your original intent. Mark the New Moon, and your New Moon intent, by lighting a fresh candle. This candle can be any color (more on this in Part VI) and any size or shape.

I find that a twelve-inch taper works most easily with the following timing: Beginning the night of the New Moon, light your candle each night until the moon is full. Each time the candle is lit, it's your reminder, your opportunity, to reflect on and bring awareness to your stated intent. The candle is lit in the darkness, and in the growing moonlight night after night until the moon is full.

Keep in mind that you want your candle to last for two weeks, so don't let it burn all night. When the moon reaches her full light, you no longer need to light a candle in the darkness. You have brought your intent out into the world, into being, as fully as possible for this moon cycle. Now begins the yin,

and less familiar, aspects of the moon's cycle. As the moon wanes, imagine that she is pouring her light into you as she disappears bit by bit each night over the next two weeks.

This cycle is centered around taking in, digesting, and assimilating the effects of focusing on your intent, of putting it out to the Goddess or Spirit for help in manifesting it. How has it changed you? What are you embodying now about this intent that you weren't before? Do you feel different? What's been happening in your life relevant to this intent? Have you practiced it? Sometimes you realize you've ignored and forgotten about it altogether. That's okay. There's next month's candle to light, another cycle to begin. Yet, when that happens, it's a wake-up call, too. You have to pay attention to what you say, and take responsibility for what you do with your energy.

A NEW MOON STORY

One night Lisa was visiting from California. We've been the best of friends since seventh grade, when our last names led us to be seated next to each other in homeroom. She had begun doing some solitary New Moon work when I told her about the great results women were getting in our circles. She had brought her New Moon candle because she wanted to light it when we were together. We'd always found that creative sparks flew when we were around one another, and she had a project that she really wanted to bring to fruition.

She lit her candle and we both closed our eyes to meditate for a little bit; but soon intense light caused mine, and then hers, to open. Her candle flame was doing a strobe dance. It was flaring up, higher than I'd ever seen a New Moon candle flame, and twisting itself up and down in a double-helix shape. She looked at me, her eyes bright with fright that was actually awe, and asked if this always happened at my rituals.

When I stopped laughing I said, "No, this is not your usual candle flame."

She asked me, "What do you think it means, Rob?"

I sang my answer, "The Goddess is alive. Magic is afoot," from a song by Z. Budapest.

"No, really."

"Really. Spirit's here in this room. I think the Goddess likes it when we get together."

"That's it. When are we going to write our screenplay?"

"How about focusing on your New Moon intent?" I reminded her.

We did, but it was hard not to keep sneaking peeks at the magical flame. Maybe that's why Spirit doesn't do parlor tricks too often, or rush to answer our calls for proof of divine existence. We're so easily distracted!

By the way, that particular project never did come through for her. It would seem that her candle had been all fired up about something else. What was it trying to show her? Only she can tell—but perhaps we really are supposed to write that screenplay!

THE EDINBURGH ECLIPSE

It was summertime in magical Scotland. My dear friend had moved there from New York the summer before, and I'd come to visit. There was to be a total lunar eclipse that night. Angela lived next door to a park that was home to a large hill that I like to remember as a wee mountain. When it was almost time for the eclipse, we climbed uphill and took a seat on a bench with a good, clear view of the sky as well as Arthur's Seat and Salisbury Crags. The only problem was, it was drizzling and misty and the sky was so clouded over we couldn't see the moon before the eclipse. We looked at each other meaningfully.

"Shall we try to sing her out?" we asked each other.

"Absolutely."

We quietly sang songs to the moon, and to our delight and gratitude, the clouds parted and the moon appeared. We couldn't help but notice that the clouds didn't go away anywhere else. It was a stunning, magical eclipse, and we felt lucky to see it. This kind of connection to the moon is natural to all women and some men, and can be strengthened and developed through conscious awareness and practice.

Women need to recover our special gifts of embodied lunar wisdom for our own sexual and spiritual health. It is time for us to bring this much-needed, healing, empowering female energy to benefit everyday life on our planet and help guide our world into the future/present—the term I use to suggest that the future has already arrived and is here now.

We in the twenty-first century are not beyond needing moon magic and women's wisdom. Fortunately, they are still available to us. Female, lunar

intuition is as close to any man as the women who touch his heart and from whom he learns, and as close to any woman as her own body.

Simple Practices for Moon Magic and Women's Wisdom

Some of the practices on the following pages are for women and men (marked ALL), some for women only (marked W), and some for menstruating women only (marked BL W, for "bleeding women").

WRITE IN RED (BL W)

- When you are menstruating, write in your journal in red pencil or ink.

This practice can be even better than keeping a separate journal, because it symbolically invites you to accept all parts of yourself. Separate journals can encourage you to keep yourself fragmented, or thinking you need to hide your inner self. This practice allows you to notice subtle or obvious differences in how you think, dream, write, perceive, or feel when you are menstruating. It is easy to leaf through your journal and review your red entries. Remember, "different" does not equal bad or lesser; it is an additional type of consciousness.

NEW MOON RITUAL (ALL)

- Choose an intention, or preferably, discover it when you meditate on or near the New Moon. Light a candle as you state your intent aloud. Commit to practicing your intention each day. For example, perhaps it is something like, "I will speak up for myself more this month." No doubt, every day will afford you at least one opportunity to do that. Each night, light your candle and affirm your intention. Leave it burning for as long as you like, keeping in mind that you want the candle to last for the next two weeks as you continue doing this simple ritual until the moon is full.

FULL MOON MEDITATION (ALL)

- When the moon is full, or as close to that time as possible—don't be rigid, as the moon certainly isn't—take a meditative moon bath, physically or

in your imagination. Let the light of the full moon shine into you. Meditate on the effects of having focused your energy and actions on your intention for the two weeks of the waxing moon. As the moon begins to wane, imagine that her light is returning into you. Let the moon help you incorporate the effects of your intent into your body and soul so that it naturally becomes part of you as you continue to learn and grow.

These two distinct but linked practices can be done alone or in a group, and are useful for both men and women to reincorporate the soul-stirring rhythms of the moon into our lives. These practices remind us that there is no place to get to, but only cycles returning to begin again, like breath. This moon work is my favorite ongoing spiritual practice. Its benefits are numerous: focusing consciousness, increasing self-awareness, shifting notions of time from linear to cyclical, attuning you to your inner life, helping you to realize your dreams.

I've found that aligning yourself with the cycles of the moon via a specific intent each month literally shifts your experience of time from linear to spiraling. Time becomes more expansive. Rather than feeling the need to rush forward all the time to keep up with it, you begin to stand in the center of "Now" as time spirals expansively, ever outward. Notions of failure and success shift too, as you understand through your own experience that the opportunity to begin anew will continue to arise again and again.

BLEEDING ON THE EARTH (BL W)

- If you are a menstruating woman, sit and bleed on a soft, mossy place on the earth. If this is not possible, bring a piece of plant material or tissue onto which you have bled and bury it in the earth as an offering under a plant or tree you are attracted to.

The practice of offering your lifeblood to the earth, which gives you sustenance and nourishment, reconnects you to the cycle of life, death, and rebirth that you share with the earth. It is so easy to forget that food comes from the soil, not the supermarket, and that everything alive decomposes to create new life. It is also common in contemporary births to lose sight of the mother creating life out of the blood of her body when the focus is on the

technology and attending experts. Menstrual blood can also be mixed with water and poured into the soil to help plants grow, including houseplants.

CRAFT A MOON BAG (BL W)

- This bag is made of red silk or rayon, which is made from tree fibers. It is sewn to hold special treasures that symbolize your womb wisdom. It reminds you that your body is sacred. The treasures within can be rearranged whenever you so desire. Crafting your moon bag helps you reclaim the Wise Woman heritage that has been shattered through repression and violence. Strong women teachers from every continent have held and protected precious shards of knowledge for the women of the world until we were ready to receive them. Silken threads of love and respect are woven together to honor our experience with bleeding, birthing, and dying. One key to the power of the moon bag as a sacred object is that when it is completed, it is never described specifically or shown to anyone. It represents that part of yourself that you can absolutely trust, the part of you that knows what you know.

MATERIALS:

Red silk or rayon cloth for the bag

Red ribbon to create a drawstring closure

Cowrie shell

Cronewort (Artemisia vulgaris) leaves

Grandmother Cedar leaves

Hawthorn berry/thorn

Any other herbs you want on or in your bag

Feather(s)

Stone or crystal, especially bloodstone and moonstone

Moon blood (on tissue or Artemisia leaf)

Seashell(s)

Anything else you'd like

My Moon Bag Story

I had a dream one night of which I could only remember one fragment: The Goddess came and showed me a beautiful, large piece of red, silky looking cloth and said, "Have the women make moon bags."

"What are moon bags?" I asked, and then I woke up.

I wondered about the meaning of the dream.

A few days later, I left New York City on a wintry afternoon and drove north with a group of apprentices to a place called Tallman Mountain State Park. We were there to walk in the woods and study medicinal plants. It was really cold for that kind of work, so we soon ended up huddled together, shivering on some benches near the parking lot. We felt more than ready to warm ourselves up with some hot herbal tea and lunch. We had begun unpacking our meal when one of the women asked curiously, "What's that?"

Before I even looked up, I got "goose bumps" all over—or "truth bumps," as my Seneca teacher Twylah Nitsch calls them. I turned and saw that the woman was pointing to something red on the ground. "Can you hand it to me, please?" I asked, feeling a familiar sense of magical awe and wonder tingle through me. She did, and it was a piece of silky, red rayon. I unfolded it again and again until the full length of material was open and exposed eight perfectly even sections. There were eight of us gathered. I looked at my apprentices and said, "Well, I guess the Goddess really wants us to make moon bags!" I described my dream to them.

AN OLD STORY

There is a famous Russian folk tale about a girl named Vasalisa, whose mother is dying when Vasalisa is still just a young child. The mother calls Vasalisa to her bedside and gives her a red, black, and white doll to keep hidden inside her pocket. The mother tells Vasalisa she can consult with the doll whenever she is in need, and can trust the answers the doll gives her. She tells her daughter she must feed the doll, and must never show her to anyone. This is only the opening to the story that goes on to include the witch Baba Yaga, evil stepsisters, and more. Vasalisa is triumphant at the end of her tests and trials. She feeds the doll, and the doll never steers her wrong. (The version that I read is found in Clarissa Pinkola Estés's *Women Who Run With the Wolves*.)

The doll is the girl's intuition, her inner wisdom. She represents the Wise Woman guide that lives within her. The daughter must move beyond her mother's protection and find her own. She must come to trust her own instincts. In the modern world, we have lost our women's wisdom teachings and our belief in our own intuitive wisdom. We are taught to trust cold calculations and rational, logical explanations over wild, wise knowing. We are adrift because of this lack.

Moon bags are symbolic of developing and trusting your intuition and instincts. The mother tells her daughter to keep the doll with her always, to feed her, and never to show her to anyone. I tell women never to show their moon bag to anyone because they may then want to make it conform to their idea of someone else's expectation or concept of beauty. Support and affirmation are wonderful and necessary, but the need for approval is so ingrained in women that it must be countered. It is not that the bag is a secret, which is often linked to feeling shame. It is private—a personal, creative bridge to complete self-confidence and personal authority. This single, symbolic gesture of self-trust has a rippling effect into other areas of life.

Just as Vasalisa fed her doll, you must always keep your intuition and instincts alive within you by asking for inner guidance. Every time you listen to your inner voice you are feeding your instincts, as Vasalisa fed hers when she fed her doll. You feed them even further when you actually follow the guidance you receive, even when it's inconvenient or contrary to what you were hoping to hear.

Your moon bag is complete when you add a drop or more of your moon blood to it. I also suggest buying or creating a special pouch or box to hold your moon bag. That way you can take it with you, to rituals, for example, without inviting an invasion of your privacy.

The bag can be used to aid you in lucid dreaming, divining, and learning the art of invisibility. Your moon bag is a bridge to your womb wisdom and links you to all women. Nearly every female apprentice of mine over the past fifteen years has made a moon bag. A few women left their bags behind, partially crafted. They weren't ready to claim their bags, or perhaps their own blessedness. I buried their bags in a sacred grove, to be held for them by the

earth. Spirit art like this, even when incomplete, should not be left around or thrown away unconsciously.

Writing about this is the first time I am teaching part of the moon bag magic outside a women's circle. I offer it freely, with trust that it will be respected, and with love, curiosity, and excitement about how the practice may grow and evolve.

Here's one idea: Mothers teach their daughters to make moon bags soon after the young woman's first menstruation, or whenever she is ready. The mother provides one special item, perhaps a cowrie shell, that she's held in her own moon bag, passing it on to her daughter.

MEETING THE MOON (ALL)

- Step outside and look at the moon. Imagine her looking back at you. How does that feel?

BATHING IN MOONLIGHT (ALL)

- Feel the moonlight shining on your face, hands, and if you have the opportunity on your whole body.
- If you can't go outside, imagine the moon bathing you in her light. Imagine feeling soft, silver-white moonlight on your face, hands, and whole body.

LEARNING THE LUNAR CYCLE (ALL)

- Familiarize yourself with the phases of waxing and waning. Here's a fun way to start. Go outside and hold your hands up to the sky, forming the letter C, as in "crescent moon," with your thumbs on the bottom. When you look up and the moon looks similar to your right hand, she is waxing—going from dark to full. When the moon looks similar to your left hand, she is waning—going from full to dark. This is true in the Northern Hemisphere, and reversed in the Southern Hemisphere. If you are in New Zealand, for example, the opposite will be true.

RISING AND SETTING MOON (ALL)

- Watch a moonrise and/or a moonset anytime during the month. Watch it every night to see how much difference there is between the time the moon rises and sets throughout the lunar month.

HOWLING LIKE WOLF OR COYOTE (ALL)

- Go outside or lean out your window and howl at the full moon. It's primal and fun. You're likely to be joined by the dogs in your neighborhood unless your neighborhood includes coyotes or wolves—then they're likely to howl with you, too.

MOONLIGHT IN YOUR BELLY (ALL)

- Imagine moonlight like a pool inside your belly. Feel the peace. Breathe deeply into your belly, inhaling and exhaling moonlight. Imagine silver moonlight spreading throughout your body, sending peace into every cell.

MOONLIGHT IN YOUR FIRST EYE (ALL)

- Stand outside and/or imagine moonlight shining into your first eye. It's right between your eyebrows. Feel the moon's light awakening and deepening your inner vision, your ability to trust how you see the world, your own perception of truth. When you are enlightened, even for an instant, this first, primary eye is fully open to see the Beauty that is everywhere.

LUNATION AND OVULATION/MENSTRUATION (BL W)

- Note your menstrual/ovulatory cycle in relation to the phase of the moon. (I use simple lunar-phase charts that I buy from SnakeandSnake.com.) Do this over time, and see if there is any recognizable pattern such as menstruating during the dark moon, or perhaps when the moon is passing through a particular astrological sign. Pay attention to your energy at different times of the month and at different times in your menstrual cycle, and see what connections you notice.

SINGING TO LA LUNA (ALL)

- Sing to the moon. She loves that. Sing any song you feel like. Learn, or better yet, write, some moon songs. Here are a few to get you started:[3]

"Grandmother Moon" (by Robin Rose Bennett)

Grandmother, Grandmother Moon,
Crescent so low,
Sacred womb wisdom
The ebb and the flow.

"Moon, moon, moon" (from Germany, author unknown)

Moon, moon, moon, slowly rising in the night
Moon, moon, moon, shining gentle and strong
Moon, moon, moon, old and wise as the sea
As the sea, as the sea.

"Neesa, Neesa, Neesa" (Seneca Song, learned from grandmother Twylah Nitsch. Neesa is translated as "moon," and gai-we-o is akin to "blessed be" or "amen.")

Neesa, neesa, neesa.
Neesa, neesa, neesa.
Neesa, neesa, neesa.
Gai-we-o
Gai-we-o.

"My Sister, the Moon" (by Spider, from Songs of Bleeding)

My sister, the Moon,
Sings her song to my womb,
We dance in the spiral of life.

FORM A MOON LODGE (W)

- Gather three or more friends and agree to meet on or near the evenings of the new and/or full moons. Do the appropriate meditation, light candles, and let each woman have a chance to speak uninterrupted. The

evenings can include singing, dancing, and drumming. You might want to share food and/or drink together when you are through.

This kind of lodge is a modern version of the ancient, global practice of menstruating women getting away for a few days together every month. It is sacred and fun. A moon lodge provides a necessary break from women's routine of taking care of their partners and families. It is exceptionally healing. One of my apprentices went on to medical school, where she formed a moon lodge with three of her sister medical students. When I got to meet them, they told me that they valued what they'd learned in their moon lodge even more than what they had learned in medical school.

Now, ten years after the original publication of *Healing Magic, A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living*, moon lodges have mushroomed into existence all over the world. You can find out more about this international movement and how to join or start your own red tent or moon lodge at RedTentTempleMovement.com.

A CLOSING NOTE

If you have had any of your sexual organs removed through surgery, you may benefit from doing a simple healing ritual with other women that can include a healing bath, herbal oils, flowers, and a safe place to cry and/or rage. Please know that your womb can be removed, but not your womb wisdom.

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3 The sheet music for these chants can be found in the appendix on pages 222 and 223.

PART FOUR

Herbal Magic

Plants—including herbs, trees, shrubs, weeds, reeds, vines, wildflowers, mosses, ferns, lichens, and seaweeds—are an integral part of Green Witch magic. They are the green in "Green Witch."

These chlorophyll-rich life forms provide us with the oxygen we breathe and the food we eat, which sustain us physically. But plants offer even more than that. They are loving allies for our mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual growth. According to one of my elder teachers, Keewaydinoquay, Woman of the Northwest Wind, "Of all the creatures on the planet, plants have remained truest to their original purpose, which is to give generously of themselves to all living creatures."

Plants are conscious beings of feeling and spirit, and they are blessed with an abundance of gifts to share. I have found that all plants are consciousness-altering. In this sense, plants grow us. They are wonderful allies to human beings, filled with love for us. Like birds and animals, plants don't have to remember that they are part of nature; they simply are who and what they are. This inevitably helps us resonate with who we are as part of nature. Each specific plant also brings its own particular essence to a meditation, spell, or ritual.

Much of my time with plants is spent working with them as physical medicine for our bodies. I have discovered that there is a correlation—sometimes subtle, often obvious—between the physical medicine a plant offers and the spiritual/magical energy it imparts.

Take garlic, for example: Magically, it is often used to repel danger and to provide powerful psychic protection. In classic Hollywood movies, it melodramatically wards off vampires. Garlic is damaging to numerous types of bacteria, fungi, and viruses. It helps strengthen the body's respiratory, digestive, and immune systems, providing powerful, physical protection. It doesn't take too great a stretch of the imagination to make a metaphoric connection between psychic assaults, legends of vampires that suck your blood and drain your life force, and certain strains of bacteria, viruses, or fungi that can make you sick or even kill you via an infection that gets into your bloodstream. Garlic helps repel them all.

Rosemary is known poetically as "for remembrance." Drinking rosemary tea, or rubbing rosemary oil into your hair and scalp, increases circulation in the scalp and the brain, enhancing dreams, eyesight, clear thinking, and good memory.

Magically, you could share some with a lover who has to travel far away from you for a while, and each of you could sleep with it under your pillow; rosemary will help you dream of each other. Or, use it in a memory charm

that you carry in your pocket or purse when you are taking a written or oral test, or going out on a job interview, or performing in a play. It is especially helpful when fear of forgetting is part of the problem.

Methods for Using Herbs Magically

Plants can be used in special ways for Healing Magic, in spells and rituals, and to aid meditation. For instance, you can burn dried herbs or resins for their smoke and incense, drink specific teas to help achieve distinct states of mind, heart, body, or soul, or decorate an altar with fresh or dried plants, flowers, fruits, nuts, or grains. Plants can be used in crafting all forms of spirit art, such as making a mask or a personal shield. Particular herbs can also be helpful in spell bags and protective or lucky charms (see: spell bags, this page).

Herbal infused oils, highly concentrated essential oils, and fragrant balms—for magic, let's call them unguents—are used as anointing oils for people and sacred objects. Herbal waters are used in atomizers as refreshing sprays for people and places. Plants infused in boiling water over long periods of time can be added to bath water to create magical baths. Herbs can also be part of magical adornment, such as wearing a flower wreath at a celebration, ritual, or ceremony.

HERBS FOR BURNING

People everywhere on Earth burn local plants that are resinous and/or high in volatile oils in their ceremonies, rituals, and religious or spiritual gatherings. These fragrant plants are called aromatics, and are prized for their consciousness-changing qualities, especially when burned as smudge. Smudge is a term used for sacred smoke. It is akin to specially charged incense. Herbs can also be smoked in a sacred manner in a pipe.

Smoke, in this as in most Earth-based traditions, is used both to create sacred space and to communicate with Spirit. It is a way of sending out prayers and giving thanks. Think of the smoke as making your thoughts and intentions visible as they're being sent out to Spirit. You draw energy to yourself, as well, by means of the smoke signals. Smoke from plants is traditionally used to bring in what you consider desirable and to cast out what you don't want, whatever you find unacceptable or harmful.

Leaves and flowers (dried only) can be burned without charcoal, directly in an abalone shell, clay pot, or cauldron. Resins and powders are burned on flat-topped, round pieces of charcoal that are usually available in herb stores and street markets where the herbs are sold. (Store charcoal in moisture-proof containers.)

First, light an edge of the charcoal in a clay dish or any fireproof container. When it is lit—you will know because it will start to spark—place the herbs on it. A feather can be used to spread the smoke through the air, whether directing it to the elements, or around altar objects, or to smudge a person by wafting the smoke all around him or her with care.

Smudge sticks are easy to use, too, and are commonly available for purchase. The "sticks" are actually leafy stalks that are dried and then bundled and tied together into a cigar shape. One "tip" is lit and the other end is held.

You can also make smudge sticks of any diameter and length by rolling up a bundle of flowering stalks snugly in a large sheet of newspaper. Secure the roll tightly with rubber bands, and remove the paper when you're ready to use the smudge stick. Before or after rolling up the herbs to dry, tie the bundle together using any color of cotton thread.

I usually prefer to use smudge sticks outdoors rather than indoors, because they tend to create a lot of smoke.

Whatever you are burning, when smudging indoors, open a window, at least for a moment, because as old energies are released, they need to be able to leave the room, and as beneficial energies are being invoked, they will be able to come to you more easily. It also helps your prayers, visions, intentions, and expressions of gratitude to travel up, down, and out beyond your immediate circle.

Plants that are wild and local to the Northeast United States, such as mugwort/cronewort *(Artemisia vulgaris)*, white and yellow sweet clovers (*Melilotus albus* and *Melilotus officinalis*), and northern white cedar *(Thuja occidentalis)* are ones that I like to gather, dry, and use frequently as smudge herbs.

I also grow lavender (*Lavandula* species) in my garden. The stalks and the flowers of any of the lavenders make a sweet, enchanting smoke.

I like white sage *(Artemisia tridentata)* very much. I also find it the easiest plant to keep lit once I get it burning. Being native to the desert, sage grows

wild in vacant lots in Los Angeles (according to my friends who live out there). I plant it in my garden in the spring to harvest in the fall.

The following properties are some of the many helpful gifts offered by each of the plants mentioned above:

Cronewort (leaves and flowers):

Vision

Dreams

Opens the third (first) eye Enhances meditation

Encourages wild nature

Safe birth

Independence

Self-esteem

Physical vitality

Prophecy

Helps women respect their bodies and female nature

Helps men respect the wise woman in themselves and, if they need the help, to respect the women in their lives

The intoxicant that helps you to remember yourself, including forgotten dreams you once had for yourself and your life that are important to remember.

White Sage (leaves):

Helps quiet mental chatter

Soothes emotional turmoil

Removes stale energies from a room

Helps everyone be fully present and focused in a group

Peacefulness

Calming

Helps in the release of energetic blockages

Enhances clear thinking

Neutralizes the energetic remnants of fear, anger, anxiety, or grief

Clears space, indoors and out

Often used for casting a circle

Lavender (flowers, leaves, and stalks):

Invites sweetness into one's heart or home

Calming

Eases stress

Beauty

Sweet dreams

Relief of nightmares

Restful sleep

Healing

Love

Grandmother Cedar (leaves):

Psychic protection

Justice

Physical safety

Ancient wisdom

Connecting with all creatures on Earth, especially plants, birds, and animals

Being embraced by the Green Woman, the Soul of Nature

Guardian for safe travels from the spiritual world to the physical world at birth, or from the physical to the spiritual world at death

Sweet Yellow (solar) and White (lunar) Clovers (flowering stalks):

Delight

Lightness

Sweetness

Celebration

Vanilla fragrance

Sensuality

Festivity

Fun

I enjoy sweetgrass, too, especially when a friend brings some from her garden in Canada. It grows wild, but it is being over-harvested, so instead of picking it I only buy it organically grown. It is most often sold in a beautiful braid. I have seen Northern indigenous people, such as the Micmacs, use sweetgrass for smudging a couple with the fragrant smoke during a wedding ceremony.

Here and in Western Europe, I have used the resins of pine, balsam fir, and spruce trees. They are all uplifting and refreshing.

I sometimes like to burn the more exotic, imported resins like sandalwood and frankincense from India, copal from Belize, and myrrh from Arabia. These can be burned on charcoal as powders or small dried pieces of resin. I enjoy imagining seeing these trees that ooze such marvelous substances, and I look forward to meeting the cinnamon tree, whose powder gets everyone intoxicated with delight when I burn it at Winter Solstice.

In this tenth anniversary edition of *Healing Magic*, I am pleased to add that I have now met cinnamon trees in several Caribbean and Central American countries, and have grown to love them very much. I also grow my own sweetgrass, harvesting it in the fall to dry for burning. It feels important to add that I've become far more aware of the need to buy only sustainably harvested herbs and resins, especially when buying rare herbs and herbs from far-away places.

MORE MAGICAL PROPERTIES OF SELECTED PLANTS AND TREES

These herbs can be used in many of the ways listed under Methods of Using the Herbs Magically (see this page). Herbs that are marked "NI" should not be

used internally. The ones marked "NIP" should not be used internally in pregnancy.

Amaranth leaves and seeds—sacred sustenance, spiritual awareness in daily life

Burdock—rooted, grounded strength; help in being centered and still; turns worriers into peaceful warriors

Cedar leaves and berries—sacred space, physical and psychic protection, divine alignment (NI)

Dandelion blossoms—joy of living; help release emotional pain; brings light into darkness

Elder blossoms—guidance into the void of all-becoming; help in moving through the chaos of transformation; respectful relations; facilitates communication with your ancestors

Forget-Me-Not flowers—friendship, partings, simple happiness (NI)

Ginger (Zingiber officinale)—sex, general stimulant, euphoria, passion (except in a bath, where it is deeply relaxing)

Ginkgo biloba leaves—accessing unused parts of the brain, past life memories, astral travel; connects ancient past with the future/present

Hawthorn blossoms—sacred sex, faeries, sensual pleasure, ecstasy

Hawthorn thorns—claiming your body as sacred space; developing and strengthening the ability to say "No" to others and "Yes" to yourself

Indigo seeds—developing personal rhythms; sacred trance journeying (NI)

Linden blossoms—bliss, faerie energy, grace, simple child like happiness; helps relieve grief; increases multidimensional awareness

Jasmine flowers—romantic, sexual, sensual energy

Mountain laurel (Kalmia latifolia)—help getting out of sticky situations, emotional or contractual (NI)

Mugwort (cronewort)—vision, insight, dream recall, personal power, female energy and wisdom; evokes wild, untamed nature in women and men (NIP)

Nutmeg—spices things up

Orange blossoms—male and female sensuality and sexuality, orgasmic bliss

Pennyroyal—hidden beauty and power, invisibility, camou flage (NIP); confidence

Queen Anne's Lace flowers—grace, life/death/rebirth, elegance, playfulness; stimulates crown chakra (NIP)

Rosemary—stimulates memory and dreams, relieves nightmares, encourages crystal-clear thinking

Sassafras leaves—joy, spirit-lifting, humor, ecstasy

Thyme—calms hysteria, helps with trusting your timing, soothes tension and anxiety

Uva ursi—storytelling, sacred smoke

Violet leaves—heart-healing; overcoming shyness, seeing and evoking sweetness in another; helpful for soothing anger and grief

Witch Hazel—water energy, flexibility, protection for homes, help in claiming your uniqueness within a community or group setting

Yarrow—neutralizes electromagnetic frequencies and radiation, helps conduct electrical energy

PREPARING HERBAL INFUSIONS FOR DRINKING

Infusions are stronger than beverage teas, and they are more potent magically as well as medicinally.

The amounts called for in the following recipes all refer to dried plant parts. You can always dilute an infusion that comes out too strong. The general guideline is that the more delicate the part and/or the more aromatic the plant, the less time you will need to steep it. Flowers are the most delicate part of all, so avoid steeping them too long, or the oils that make flowers fragrant will turn rancid and ruin the taste. (See Flowers, below.)

Leaves: Put one ounce of leaves in a quart jar or pot. Fill container to the rim with boiling water. Cap so that it's airtight. Steep, unrefrigerated, for four to eight hours. After that, strain by pouring off the liquid and squeezing out the herbs to get as much of the liquid as you can. Refrigerate to store. All of

these infusions (of leaves, roots, flowers, berries, hips, or seeds) can be drunk hot or cold. I strongly suggest reheating them on a stovetop, not in a microwave. Heat slowly, without boiling.

Flowers: Follow exactly the same measurements and procedures, except only steep your herbs for one hour or so. (Exceptions: chamomile, twenty minutes; red clover blossoms, four to eight hours.)

Berries, Hips, and Seeds: Put one to two ounces of berries, hips, or seeds into a quart jar. Steep berries and hips from four to eight hours, to taste. Infuse seeds for thirty minutes or less.

Barks and Roots: Put two ounces of chopped or whole roots or bark into a quart jar. Follow directions as for leaves, above. Steep overnight.

I make fresh herb infusions "to taste," and simply put a good quantity of herbs in the jar, and then learn from experience how strong I like to make the infusion for that particular plant. Steeping times can vary widely with fresh herbs. For example, I steep fresh white pine needle tea (see this page–this page) from overnight to one week, whereas I only infuse fresh ginger root tea (NIP) for about one hour. Fresh rosemary leaves will taste best steeped for about half an hour.

I never make my preparations in plastic or aluminum containers. I use a glass jar, ceramic teapot or pitcher, or stainless steel pots. I use the best-quality water available to me, clean well water when possible or, when necessary, in order of preference: filtered water, bottled water (in glass), or bottled water (in plastic). Water is the most vital healing substance on the earth, and the quality of the water you use affects the potency of the herbal infusion you prepare.

HERBAL OILS

I make mention of several types of oils—essential, infused, and ointments, or unguents.

Essential oils are highly concentrated plant preparations that, generally speaking, cannot be made at home and are for external, not internal, use.

Essential oils are extracted from plants in a variety of ways such as high pressure, steam distillation, or chemical solvents.

Infused oils can be made at home or purchased. They are often safe for internal and external use, depending on the herb being infused. Make your own infused oil by cutting or tearing fresh herbs into smaller pieces and filling a jar with them almost to the top. Make sure not to wash herbs you're making oil with; nor should you wash your jar or lid close to the time you'll be filling it. Water and oil together equal mold, so be sure everything you're working with is absolutely dry.

Fill the jar with cold-pressed olive oil, and then poke openings in the plant material with a wooden chopstick to make sure the oil saturates all of the herbs. Slowly fill your jar to the rim, making sure to completely cover all the herbs with oil and leave no airspace at the top. Cap with an airtight lid. Set this jar on a saucer, because oil is very likely to leak down the sides of the jar as gas bubbles expand inside it. For this reason, I also suggest putting a label on the lid, not the jar, with the name of the herb, what it's prepared in, and the date you are making it. This oil will be ready in six weeks. You can also include on your label the date when it will be ready. For example, your label could read: Fresh Rosemary in olive oil—June 12, 2014, ready July 24, 2014.

Check it every couple of days, especially during the first two weeks, and top up the olive oil in the jar as needed. Set the jar out of direct sunlight in a cool, dry place where you will remember to check it. Do not refrigerate, as this adds moisture to your oil, which will spoil it. When herbal infused oil does spoil, it starts to get a mold, usually right on the top. Spoon out the mold as soon as you see it, and remove any plant material that is sticking up or has mold on it. Top up the rest with olive oil. If mold appears throughout the oil, throw it out and start over.

If you want to make infused oil with dried herbs, follow exactly the same instructions, except filling your jar approximately one-third full with herbs, and still completely full of olive oil. (The only fresh herb oil that I make in these proportions is garlic oil, as it's so strong.) Dry herb preparations may not bubble over the jar as much, as there's less volatility in the dried herbs. They also won't be as strong, but they can still be used.

Six weeks later, decant your preparation by pouring off the oil into a clean, dry jar. Strain out the herbs with a fine-mesh strainer and/or unbleached cotton cheesecloth; squeeze them out to get the most from them. Leave your

oil sitting out for a day or so, and you will see a layer of water has formed at the bottom. Carefully pour the oil off into a clean, dry jar, leaving the water layer behind. (The watery part can be discarded or used right away—added to a bath, for example.)

Label the jar or lid, and enjoy your freshly prepared oil. Store it in a dry, shaded place.

Ointments can also be made or purchased. They are made by melting beeswax and stirring it into infused oil to solidify. Ointments are the same as salves, balms, and unguents. They are generally prepared for external use. Pour the herbal oil, with the plant material already strained out, into a saucepan. Put it on a very low heat, and stir in about one tablespoon of grated beeswax to each ounce of oil. When the beeswax melts, pour the mixture into a jar with a wide enough opening to reach into, because when it hardens you won't be able to pour it out. Watching the oil turn to unguent as it hardens from the bottom up is already magical, before you even use it! If your balm turns out too hard or too soft, re-melt it in the saucepan and add more oil (to soften it) or beeswax (to harden it), as desired.

Lastly, you can also make herbal oil by cooking dried or fresh herbs in olive oil on the lowest possible heat, using from two to four cups of oil to one cup of herbs. I also vary the cooking time widely depending on the herbs being used. A good basic cooked herbal oil recipe is to simmer the covered mixture on very low heat for several hours and then let it steep, covered, for twenty-four hours before decanting as described above.

HERBAL BATHS

Sometimes magical baths are taken to prepare for a ritual or spell—and sometimes they *are* the ritual or spell.

A magical bath is prepared by making half a gallon of herbal infusion as described previously (see Preparing Herbal Infusions for Drinking, this page). Add the decanted infusion of herbs (that's the liquid only) to your bathwater.

Baths can also be made with oils. Infused oils are added while the water is running. Two tablespoons or so of herbal oil is usually a good amount. Slowly pour it into the tub with the water running. Stir it in to help distribute the oil.

You can also make a magical bath with an essential oil. For this, don't add the oil until your bathtub is full. When you've shut the water off, add five to thirty drops of essential oil to your bathwater, and gently stir it in. If you add it with the water running, it dissipates too rapidly. Use your sense of smell to decide how much essential oil you like. Remember, essential oils are highly concentrated.

Lavender flowers are an example of an herb that you might use for a magical bath in any one of the forms just described—infused tea, infused oil, or essential oil. Any one of them would yield the properties listed for lavender (see this page) in the section on Herbs for Burning.

Tree Magic

Trees are potent magical friends and allies. Like herbs, trees are visible, living reminders of Healing Magic. You can be reminded of that simply by observing them, appreciating them, loving them. Say hello to a tree you pass all the time and never really notice. They like being noticed and admired. Who doesn't? Thank it, or any of the trees near you, for cleaning your air, for giving you oxygen to breathe. Send your thoughts to a tree you think is beautiful.

Be still, and you may notice movement all of a sudden, as if the leaves begin dancing in a breeze that isn't there. If it's winter and the tree is bare, the bark itself may seem to shimmer for a moment as it receives your message of love. You always think that surely it must be your imagination—until you find out just how many others have seen exactly the same phenomenon!

It's okay to risk being called a tree-hugger; remember that insults are a matter of perception. I recall a student of mine telling me about an exasperated woman, another mother in the playground, getting red in the face as she spluttered in total exasperation and disgust, "You, you—Earth Mother, you!"

Put your arms around a tree and hug it. If you haven't done that or climbed a tree since you were a child, you'll be amazed at how delicious it feels. We've been taught not to do these things as adults—to be embarrassed or even ashamed of such loving actions. We need to get over that. That thinking is what's foolish, not hugging or climbing up inside a tree friend.

Trees can be incorporated into spells and rituals by learning about their special qualities and asking them to help with or participate in what you are doing. Many books could be written on this subject.

Here are a few examples.

MAPLE (ACER SPECIES)—FOR FRIENDSHIP MAGIC

Have you ever tasted maple syrup? Or better yet, fresh sap? How sweet it is. And what is sweeter than true friendship?

You could decide to do a fun ritual or ceremony to celebrate a beloved friendship. Maybe you want to do a spell to call in a like-minded friend or friends. Perhaps you've just moved to a new area, or changed jobs, or have always been solitary and now feel lonely. Possibly you were in a relationship that's ended, and realize you spent all your time with him or her and don't have friends—and of course you have always needed friends. Maybe you've changed and outgrown the people you're used to spending your time with, and need a new circle of stimulating friends. Maple is very friendly, and loves to help you be friendly, too. Maple leaves and twigs can decorate an altar, fill a silk spell bag, or be pinned to your clothing. They can be incorporated into a wreath for ritual wear. You can share delicious maple syrup or sap to honor the sweetness of your friendship in a simple ritual.

BLACK BIRCH (BETULA LENTA)—FOR GENEROSITY MAGIC

Black birch twigs have a strong wintergreen flavor that you can smell and taste. If you harvest them for tea in the spring or early summer, be careful to harvest only small twigs; otherwise birch may give you more sap than is good for her—such is her giving nature.

If you are cultivating your own generosity or looking to call forth the generosity of an organization to fund your event or petitioning a grant committee to grant you start-up money, black birch is a wonderful ally to ask for help. Or perhaps you are asking for a well-deserved raise and your boss is notoriously stingy. Either way, black birch, also called cherry birch, is your tree.

Use her leaves and/or twigs. Drink fresh twig infusion while imagining yourself gratefully receiving exactly what you are asking for. If you know where a black birch tree is growing, you can write down exactly what you are asking

for, and bury your paper under the tree. Water is a wonderful give-away for your thank-you to the tree.

LINDEN (TILIA AMERICANA/EUROPAEA)—FOR HAPPINESS MAGIC

The sweet smell of linden blossoms in June gets all the bees in the neighborhood into a state of bliss. Linden can do the same for you.

Whenever I harvest linden blossoms in Central Park, children come right there to play. Sometimes lindens have branches that form a circular canopy down to the ground all around the tree. Stand under a linden tree with its tall, strong trunk, heart-shaped leaves, and rounded crown. It looks like the tree everyone drew in kindergarten. Your heart will soon feel lighter, and you will be ready to play again too.

Carry a bag filled with dried linden blossoms, or sleep with it under your pillow. Drink linden blossom tea to help you recover from grief. Linden can help you feel young and vibrant again when you feel old and tired, defeated, or in despair.

On a different note, drink linden tea before taking a trance journey to the otherworld, the magical dimension deep within the earth. Linden is subtly intoxicating (in a totally natural, non-addictive way) and can sometimes help you see the faerie folk. (I suspect the faeries can smell when someone has drunk either linden or hawthorn blossom tea.)

WHITE PINE (PINUS STROBUS)—FOR PEACE MAGIC

What magic could be more important than this? White pine's flexible branches and evergreen needles offer us the medicine of inner peace, which also creates peace in our homes and in the world.

Indigenous people on the North American continent have always respected the magical gifts of plants and trees. One teacher named Jake Swamp (1941–2010), a Mohawk chief and university guest lecturer, traveled far and wide during his lifetime planting white pine trees for peace. There are two in Central Park in New York City. One is in Strawberry Fields, home of John Lennon's memorial. I think John's spirit must be pleased about that.

As with all tree magic, the easiest thing to do is sit or stand with the tree and let your imagination flow. You may not know how to identify trees. I hope

this will inspire you to learn their names, or at least to look more closely and appreciatively at those trees that live around you.

Listen to what the tree is telling you. Ask it for what you need. You could do some writing or drawing as a form of trance-work, perhaps working with a question like, "What can bring more peace into our home? What is keeping me from feeling at peace? Is there something that I can do to help?" Let the white pine of peace stimulate your inner peace, and help you to be and bring peace into the world around you. The infusion is helpful for calm, deep breathing, which is known to help you properly focus and release or direct your anger. This promotes peace, too.

NORTHERN WHITE CEDAR (THUJA OCCIDENTALIS)—FOR PROTECTION MAGIC

There is an Anishinabe story that Keewaydinoquay used to tell about the animals bringing the first cedar tree up from the center of the earth long ago. This tree, respectfully called "Grandmother" ever since, was called to be a protector for the two-leggeds (humans) of the earth. We apparently needed all the help we could get, even back then. Standing inside a grove of Grandmother Cedar trees, whether physically or in your imagination, is an excellent way to reclaim a feeling of safety.

If you have to be involved in a potentially dangerous situation, or if you have been attacked psychically or physically, use homemade or store-bought infused oil of the needlelike leaves or berries of Grandmother Cedar. Massage yourself with it all over your body, or add two tablespoons of the oil to your bath. Essential oil is also fine to use. Add five to thirty drops to your healing bath.

Grandmother Cedar essential oil is generally sold under the name of *Thuja* (not cedarwood, which is a different oil), and though it is highly concentrated, it is safe enough to be applied directly onto skin in small amounts. The essential oil can also be diluted with water and added to an atomizer for a protective and refreshing spray. Infused tea, for external use only, can be made by covering the twigs and leaves with boiled water, and allowing them to steep for several hours. When the infusion is cool, that can also be added, undiluted, to an atomizer.

Thank Grandmother Cedar for her help and she will provide it abundantly, whether as preventive medicine—which is always preferable—or to help you

with healing from any type of assault you have suffered. Grandmother Cedar will help you with what I call "divine alignment"—being attuned, aware, and fully present in the moment.

GINKGO (GINKGO BILOBA)—FOR ANCIENT WISDOM AND REBIRTHING MAGIC

Ginkgo biloba, the oldest flowering tree on the planet, an evolutionary link and once almost extinct, is native to China but now growing worldwide. It was the first tree to sprout, grow, and thrive after the U.S. nuclear bomb devastated Hiroshima, Japan, ending World War II.

Walking in Central Park one afternoon, I was drawn to lean my back against a small to medium-sized *Ginkgo biloba* tree in the middle of the park. I relaxed, keeping my eyes open just enough to maintain awareness of my surroundings. I imagined my psychic roots going down into the earth and intertwining with the tree's roots. I slowed down my breathing to help me relax, and gradually let myself melt into the tree and be silent. Then, I heard the tree saying, "Yes, yes, tell them to eat me and drink me. I wait here in my ancient form to awaken the parts of your brain that have never been used before."

Did you know that every molecule in your body has already been in existence for fifteen billion years—and goes back to the original birth of time and space itself? This tree's leaves, taken as a tea, or in a bath, or used as an anointing ointment, increase your sense of the vastness of time and the universe. *Ginkgo biloba* helps you reclaim your ancientness, which brings with it wildness, instinct, intuition, and wisdom. *Ginkgo biloba* helps you know that you, too, will come back, will rise again, will emerge reborn—like spring coming out from between the legs of winter—no matter what has happened to you.

Offering a Give-away to Thank the Plants and Trees

Thank the plants and trees by leaving them an offering before and/or after your magical work. The intention is to ask the plant for permission before harvesting, and to help yourself be conscious of the fact that you are receiving precious gifts when you harvest and use these green treasures from Mother Earth. Trees and plants like all sorts of things as offerings, including water, a

piece of your hair, a song, a hug, herbs, tobacco, cornmeal, moon blood, a crystal, seeds, dried flowers, even your tears. Any natural item that means something special to you is fine to use as your give-away. You could put together different herbs to make a nice mixture for a give-away blend, such as:

Combine equal parts of cedar leaves, roses, lavender flowers, and cronewort leaves and flowers, perhaps adding little shells or crystals. Sometimes I simply use cornmeal or organic tobacco. Or touch. Or I offer a song. Susun Weed taught me to seek out "the grandmother," the healthiest, heartiest-looking plant or tree of the community and species of herbs from which I am gathering, and to make my offering to her, but never to gather from that particular plant or tree. (Some of my Native American teachers have shown me to make my offering to the very plant I wish to gather, so I am reminded again that there is not just one "right way" to do these things.)

This practice helps you develop your listening skills and your respect for the natural world as you open your inner ear to hear the "voice" of the plants. You can also simply offer your presence and full attention. Stop and be with the plant or tree, in silent gratitude. That, too, is a fine offering.

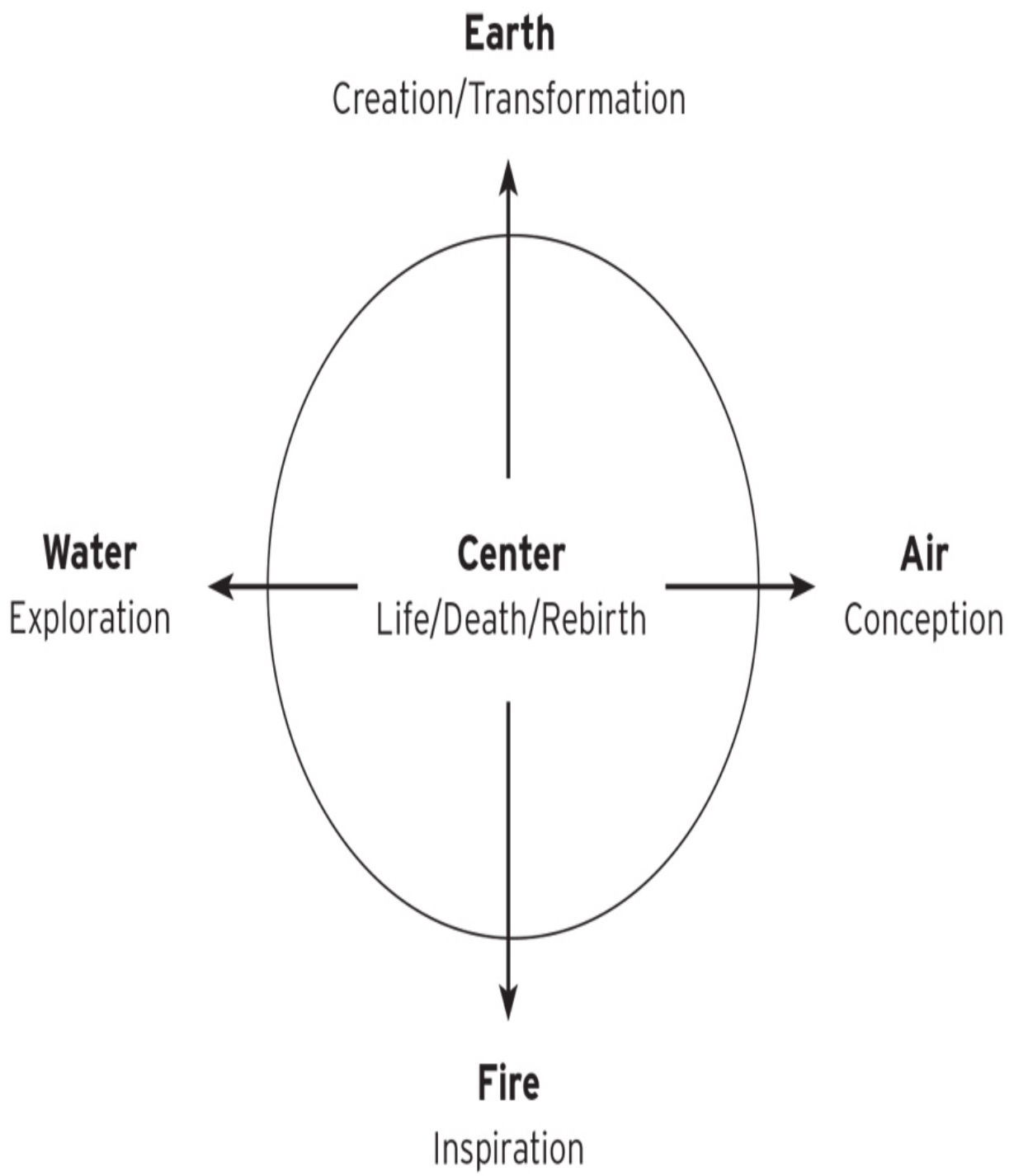
If you ever hear "no" in response to your request, please heed the message, even if you have no idea why the answer would be "no." Trust what you hear, intuit, or feel. I have heard many interesting stories about this over the years. Here's one: A woman harvesting red clover asked the plants for permission and heard "no." Though she continued to hear it, she couldn't believe that she could possibly hear plants communicating with her. After she had spent several hours gathering it and was preparing to go home, she discovered a sign that said, "Pesticides sprayed within the last twenty-four hours." The sign had fallen over and she hadn't noticed it. Her entire harvest went back to the earth, and she has never again forgotten that "No means no."

You can usually buy many of the tree barks, leaves, flowers, whole plants, seeds, and herbs that you use for magic. When you do this, it is a good idea to hold the leaves, twigs, flowers, berries, or seeds, or place your hands on them, and quietly communicate your thanks to the plant or tree they were harvested from, before you do any magical work. This can make a big difference, especially if your plants or tree parts were not harvested with conscious awareness and respect. Whenever you possibly can, support smaller herb businesses where people grow herbs organically and harvest them with love and the knowledge that these plants are sacred. Be a picky consumer, and

exercise your buying power as a citizen of the world who cares about the earth's health. What's good for the earth is good for you, and for everything and everyone else, too.

PART FIVE

The Medicine Wheel of Magic



Magical/spiritual/earth-based rituals and ceremonies all over the world are done in a sacred circle that calls in and calls on the natural elements that we and our universe are made of. They are truly universal.

The elements and directions are invoked magically to cast the circle and create sacred space, to give thanks, to call for protection, to do healing rituals

and ceremonies, to do spell work, and to receive energy and blessings. There will be more on all of these in Parts VI, "Spells," and Part VII, "Rituals." Here the focus is on exploring the elements as a living map of the terrain covered when you bring any idea from the invisible realm of your imagination all the way through to visible creation in the physical world.

I have listened to male and female Peruvian shamans from the Andes who do their sacred work, as Green Witches do, within a circle of the four elements and seven directions. As I listened to their beautiful teachings, coming from a different part of the earth and therefore a different perspective, I was struck by the realization that the essence, the heart of what they were doing there and we are doing here, is the same. I have had the same insight listening to modern pagans, African herbalists, North American Indian medicine people (particularly the women), Tibetan monks, Catholic liberation theologians, ecofeminists, and old school Vermonters, among others.

The time has long since arrived for women and men of all colors, cultures, and generations to build bridges between our differences that invite us to visit one another where we live. Then we see, and are changed by seeing, the common humanity we share.

Magic is generated in telling each other our stories. We need to remember our oldest stories, and encourage the writing and telling of new ones. Stories birth the world. The more openly our spiritual, magical, and healing traditions are shared, the more amalgams will occur within and among them. This is not culture-robbing, stealing sacred practices and claiming them as our own. This is natural abundance. It is what happens when we come together, sharing our songs, stories, dances, blessings, and rituals. We influence each other's expressions and celebrations of the sacred, of the earth and sky that unite us. It is good to have many choices of which sacred path to walk, but from one moment to the next, they all lead *home*.

The Medicine Wheel of Magic is a creation story for the unfolding journey that spirals out from life/death/rebirth in the center and moves all the way around the wheel from conception to creation/transformation before returning to the center again. You travel partway or fully around this wheel over and over again throughout your lifetime. Exploring it deliberately and knowingly can help you make conscious, creative choices and take purposeful actions: to practice magic, to do something exciting or nourishing that you

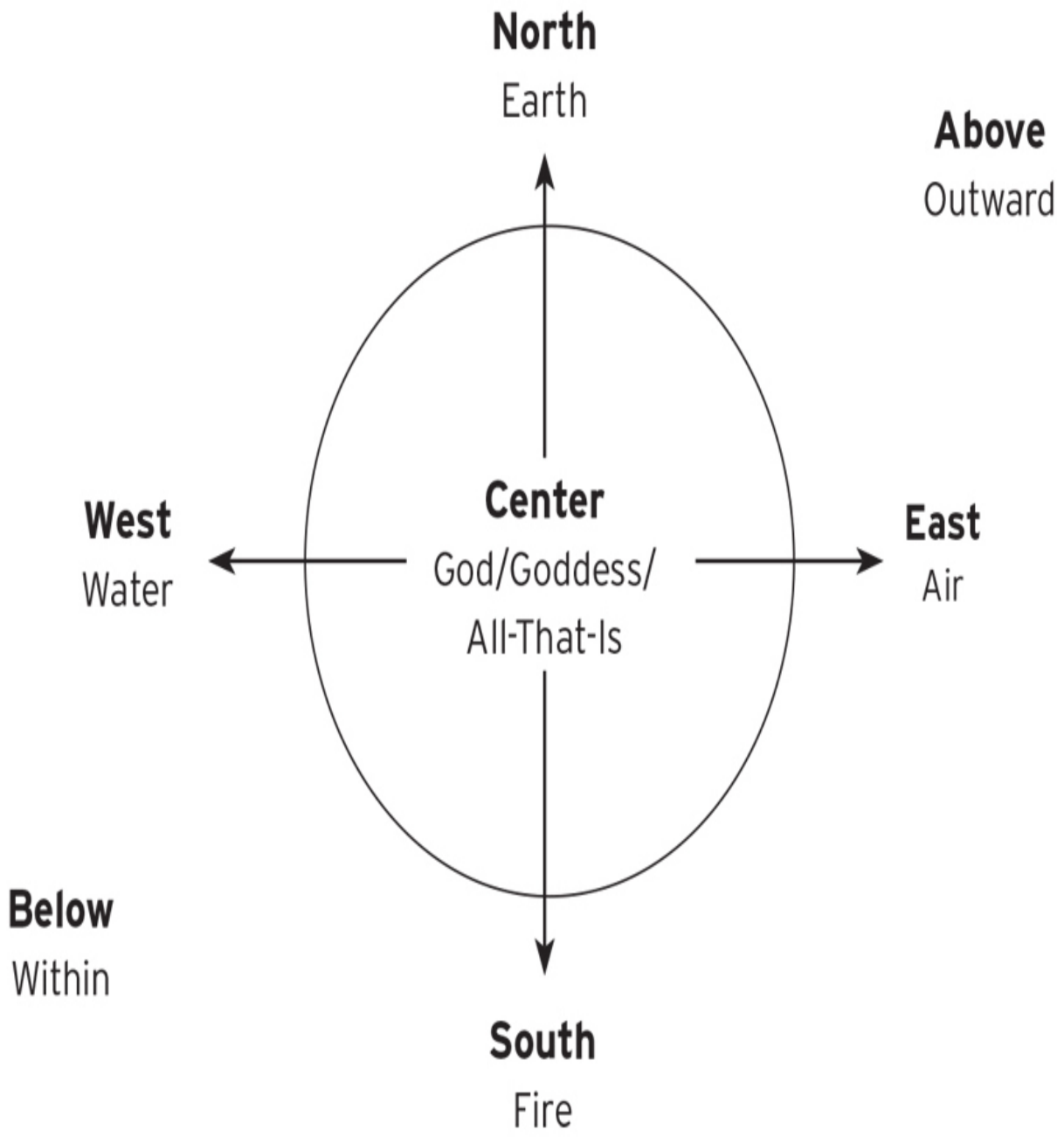
haven't done before, to begin or complete a creative project, or to restructure a major aspect of your life in order to be authentically yourself, happy, and free.

As far back as I can remember, I have always known that magic is natural—that it is native to our world and universe—and that real life is multidimensional; but I didn't have any idea what to do with this knowing except to try and hide it sometimes. I didn't understand that I could learn to work with it in this way.

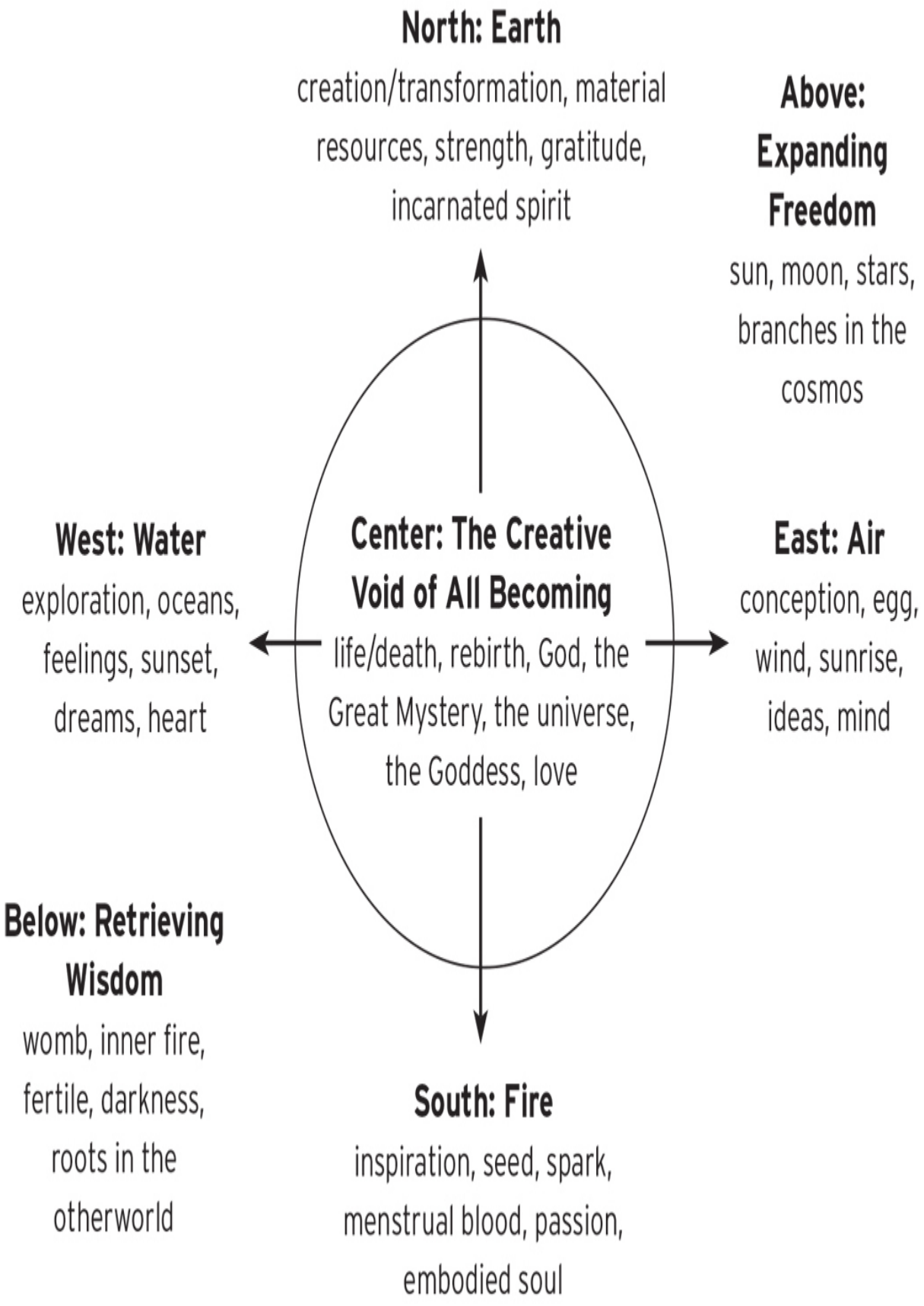
Magic requires imagination, but it is not false. Though imagination can be used to deceive or play make-believe, *it can also be used to conceive and begin the process of conscious creativity*.

To find and rekindle your magical power, you need to reconnect your consciousness, because you have never lost the actual connection with the ancient elemental nature of your being—the earth, air, fire, and water. Remember the roots you hold within the heart of the earth and your original relationship to the heavens above. Whatever you call Magic, it is held in the center. The divine center is where matter and spirit meet, the place where uniqueness (self) and oneness (All-That-Is) reunite. The center is the sacred mystery ... life, death, and rebirth ... absolute formless love eternally presenting itself through ever-changing forms. Entering the center, you remember that it is held within you.

The magical circle I originally learned—the foundation upon which I am building the Medicine Wheel of Magic—is one common to Green, Dianic, and Wiccan traditions of witchcraft; Celtic faerie traditions; and some North and South American Indian traditions. Perhaps one day I'll find out that my own Russian-Jewish ancestors worked in this way—who knows? I was an herbalist for nearly fifteen years before I found out that my mother's grandmother Esther was a renowned herbalist in the Russian-Jewish communities, and perhaps beyond, of early 20th-century Brooklyn. There may be many more people who envision the wheel in this particular way:



There are variations in the symbols associated with the points around the circle or wheel. A color, animal, or direction that represents air in one tradition might represent water or earth in another. The elements themselves remain what they are. Air is air, fire is fire, water is water, and earth is earth. The directions, too, are constant. East is always east, the direction where the sun rises. The circle is held from below, watched over from above, and the center is that which cannot truly be put into words, but we call it Love, Great Mystery, God—Goddess—All-That-Is, and countless other names.


North: Earth
creation/transformation, material resources, strength, gratitude, incarnated spirit
Above: Expanding Freedom
sun, moon, stars, branches in the cosmos
West: Water
exploration, oceans, feelings, sunset, dreams, heart
Center: The Creative Void of All Becoming
life/death, rebirth, God, the Great Mystery, the universe, the Goddess, love
East: Air
conception, egg, wind, sunrise, ideas, mind
Below: Retrieving Wisdom
womb, inner fire, fertile, darkness, roots in the otherworld
South: Fire
inspiration, seed, spark, menstrual blood, passion, embodied soul

The following meditation helps you realign, experientially, with the elements and the seven directions. You can read it slowly to yourself. It works best, though, when you—or all the people in the circle if you're in a group—stand and face each direction, each element, as it is being called. Raise your arms and turn both palms out toward the direction you are calling.

ONE HEART MEDITATION

There is one heart at the center of the wheel.

We call to the Spirits of the East to guide us.

Spirits of the East inspire each new day—
Sun rises and illuminates creation.
Spirits of the east are the spirits of air,
Conceiving first breath of life
In the one heart
At the center
Of the wheel.

We call to the Spirits of the South to guide us.

Spirits of the South ignite the flame of self,
Sparking a burning desire for being.
Spirits of the south are the spirits of fire,
Fueling the passion of blood
In the one heart
At the center
Of the wheel.

We call to the Spirits of the West to guide us.

Spirits of the West regenerate endings
In Grandmother's cauldron of death and rebirth.

Spirits of the west are the spirits of water,
Stirring depths of compassion
In the one heart
At the center
Of the wheel.

We call to the Spirits of the North to guide us.

Spirits of the North birth essence into form;
Mothers bring forth bodies into time and space.
Spirits of the north are the spirits of Earth,
Waking the heartbeat of love
In the one heart
At the center
Of the wheel.

We call to the Spirits Below to guide us.

Spirits Below guide us down beneath the ground,
Deep under life's surface
To unearth
The one heart
At the center
Of the wheel.

We call to the Spirits Above to guide us.

Spirits Above guide us up into the sky
As we spread our wings
To let fly
The one heart
At the center

Of the wheel.

There is one heart at the center of the wheel
And in every body
The one heart beats.

Ultimately all magical work, and all spiritual growth, revolves around reuniting in love with the natural elements of the earth and cosmos, remembering to be here now, in love with life. That's why so many of our visionary poets and writers—Wendell Berry or Terry Tempest Williams, for example—teach repeatedly about the importance of place, of putting down roots somewhere and getting to know the intricacies and specifics of one piece of the earth and all that it contains, how its systems work together. This helps us know how precious our relationship to nature, the source of all our primary resources, really is. Remembering our relationship with the earth, air, fire, and water is part of humanity's common path of evolution, because we *are* earth, air, fire, and water.

We can also use our re-formed relationships with the elements to re-establish good relationships with everyone and everything, including ourselves. When we are in intimate touch with what is larger than ourselves, it helps connect us all. The "technology" of magic will obviously not, and need not, replace modern technology, but it has a great deal to offer. If we remember that these elements are part of the invisible underpinning upon which everything else rests, we will be wiser and more respectful, even in awe, of life in its natural "unimproved" state.

My Wise Woman tradition (Green Witch) teachers taught me to call in the elements as guardians to hold and contain energy when I cast a magical circle for ritual. My Native American teachers taught me to give praise to the elements and directions in ceremony within their Medicine Wheels. The teachings are alike in the essential aspects of creating sacred space, honoring the earth, and providing a participatory story of ongoing creation, a

framework of how the universe works and how to find and claim your personal power within it.

Walking the Medicine Wheel of Magic is like walking a labyrinth. To understand its power, you need to walk it again and again.

Imagine walking the wheel as if it were one day:

East—dawn

South—noon

West—dusk/twilight/sunset

North—night/midnight

You begin with the rising sun, move into the high heat of the day, wind down in the shadows of sunset, and rest/sleep in the deep night, until you begin again with the rising sun of a new day.

Next, as if it were one year:

East—spring

South—summer

West—autumn

North—winter

The life force wakes up in the spring, heightens in the summer, bears fruit and seeds in the autumn, and then goes underground in the winter, where it is safely held until rebirth in the spring.

The Medicine Wheel of Magic is:

East—conception

South—inspiration

West—exploration

North—creation/transformation

You get a new idea (east), and then get excited about it (south), so you find out what the possibilities are for how it could happen (west), and then you make your choices and go on to create something tangible (north). Once it is

manifested in the material world, it begins transforming, whether you've put up new bookshelves or put on a Broadway show.

You walk around this wheel over and over again throughout your life. Walking it consciously can help bring great ideas out of your head and into your life—and out to the world, where your great ideas are definitely needed.

The Medicine Wheel is a circle, and the circle is part of the spiral, an even more intrinsic shape of life in our universe. The spiral is what the circle expands to become as you travel it through time.

Every single morning, the sun rises in the east again; but when it does, nothing—not even yourself—is exactly the same as the day before. The sun isn't even rising at the same time today that it did yesterday. You come back to each element of the wheel, just as surely as the spring equinox, the first day of spring, comes each year; but nothing and no one is precisely the same when it does.

The wheel of life, death, and rebirth is not like a psychic treadmill or stair-climbing machine, where you're stuck, always going, and getting nowhere. Nor are you caught in a web where your life force, your personal spiral, has to steadily contract, weaken, and diminish from a certain age onward—though we have all insidiously been taught to expect this for ourselves. Life is designed much more brilliantly than that. It has bigger possibilities in store for us than endless repetition or steady, inevitable decline on all levels.

The Medicine Wheel of Magic does, however, include grief, loss, aging, and death—as it must, because life does. These are held in the west. The waters that are life itself also take back what's being released from form, including dreams that never quite came to be. The west is where you let go of what is leaving you, or what you are leaving, by choice or destiny. In Celtic faerie traditions, you sail off into the west when making your final crossing at death. I think of it as a psychic transformation point, like the last rays of the setting sun in the west before total darkness falls.

We conceive, think, and imagine endlessly, consciously and intuitively, awake and asleep. But many, many times we don't make it all the way around the wheel from conception to creation/transformation. Of course we don't physically manifest every idea we have—that would be completely overwhelming. But there are also dreams that you really thought would happen, that you believed in and worked toward, that didn't ever manifest in physical reality for whatever reasons. These losses must be grieved and released

with acceptance, not resignation, in order for your creative energy to be fully available to you in the present.

It is necessary to go down and around the spiral, not only up and around. This is what deepens us as human beings. Contemporary life is overly geared toward rising, achieving heights, making the most of the day, transcending your body's needs, contacting your higher self to become a better person. For your health and your creative magic, you need to let yourself trust down as much as up, dark as much as light, female as much as male.

Lower your body down, and sit on the earth. Sleep outside on the ground sometimes. Allow yourself to melt into a pool of moonlight, where you can soften and be replenished. Attend lovingly to your body's needs. Contact your deeper, feeling self, and just be who you are.

"Old Woman, Wise Woman" (by Robin Rose Bennett)[4]

Old Woman, Wise Woman, come sing out your song.
Help me to sing, too, and I'll sing along.
mmm mmm mmm mmm,
mmm mmm mmm mmm. (repeat)

Old Woman, Wise Woman, sunrise eastern air
Shines each new day to be lived if I dare.
mmm mmm mmm mmm,
mmm mmm mmm mmm. (repeat)

Old Woman, Wise Woman, blaze-hot southern fire
Burns with the passion of my heart's desire.
mmm mmm mmm mmm,
mmm mmm mmm mmm. (repeat)

Old Woman, Wise Woman, flows west to the sea,
Guides me to dream who I came here to be.
mmm mmm mmm mmm,

mmm mmm mmm mmm. (repeat)

Old Woman, Wise Woman, ground of northern Earth
helps me to honor the gift of my birth.
mmm mmm mmm mmm,
mmm mmm mmm mmm. (repeat)

Old Woman, Wise Woman, below and within,
Black fertile darkness, where all life begins.
mmm mmm mmm mmm,
mmm mmm mmm mmm. (repeat)

Old Woman, Wise Woman, above and beyond,
White moon and starlight are your magic wand.
mmm mmm mmm mmm,
mmm mmm mmm mmm. (repeat)

Old Woman, Wise Woman, the centering force
The Great Mystery is that love is our source.
mmm mmm mmm mmm,
mmm mmm mmm mmm. (repeat)

The spiral you are traveling when you consciously walk the Medicine Wheel of Magic begins in the creative void in the center. You spiral out in a clockwise direction, beginning in the east, walking around the wheel in ever-widening arcs as you grow and learn. You become more than you were before, not less. You expand and evolve to encompass your experiences and embody more of your true nature.

Here's an example of walking the wheel in one specific situation:

One day I think, "I'm ready to move out of the city to a place on some land. I moved here 'for a little while'—fifteen years ago! I'm longing for the solace of nature." I've got my idea, pulled it out of the air, and conceived an intention. I'm in the east—conception—thinking, thinking ...

The danger here is that I could do nothing but think about it, staying stuck in the east, in eternal conception with no labor and therefore no birth: "I could move to the Catskills; they're so beautiful. But on the other hand, the Catskills are so far—if I'm going to go that far, I might as well consider Oregon ..." I can stay in the east, perhaps for years, comfortably or uncomfortably, while I wait until it's the right time, or I have the money, or I meet someone to do it with—or, or, or ... Maybe I will actually do it sometime, and maybe I won't.

If I let it go, dropping my attachment to an idea that's not proving to be timely or fruitful, I will return to the center and, in the natural course of things, conceive a new idea that will bring me back to the east again: "I know! Maybe what I really want is to move to a larger apartment in the city with great windows and a shared roof garden!"

I get excited about this idea. I decide I really desire it. My heartbeat quickens. "I need to make plans! I'll start looking at places!" I tell all my friends, and want everyone to be passionately supportive. I've moved round the wheel into the south—inspiration. The south, fire, can be a tricky element, too. Many people spend a lot of time going back and forth between the east and south, rarely making it past the stage of inspiration. You can get so fired up that you burn yourself, and your idea, out. (Oh, well—back to the east, to new beginnings again.)

Your enthusiasm, excitement, and passion are fed by, and feed, the inspirational fire in the south when you learn to be wise with it. This happens over time, and with experience. Some projects, for example, need to be talked about right away with as many people as will listen. Others need a more subtle form of passion and excitement, allowing the project or process to build up a certain momentum before being shared, all the while keeping the fire within burning steadily.

In the case of my future country home, the feelings remain strong and inspire me to move into the next phase of potentially birthing my intangible idea into tangible form. I am ready to explore the possibilities, to find out if there's a way I can do this that works for me in relation to the rest of my life. I need to feel into this, and I need information: What else will this require me to change? I don't want to move too far away. Does anything exist within my price range that's close enough for me to continue to work in the city, see my friends, and be on land? What exactly are my options?

I've moved around the wheel to the west—exploration. It's time to swim in the waters, put out my feelers, and see what I can find. Here the danger is drowning. I can look at so many places, and consider so many options, that I can't make a decision. I can overwhelm myself with possibilities, and not choose anything.

Many plans make it only as far as the west. Each stream or river has its own benefits and drawbacks, both visible and invisible. You can debate them for so long that you lose interest, or the time for moving passes. It's also possible that upon exploring in the west you choose not to proceed for perfectly good reasons that you simply hadn't discovered yet. Then it's time to cross the wheel and return again to the center. But if you don't drown in possibilities, you swim in the west until you find the stream that leads you to what you were looking for.

I find a charming cabin within commuting distance of the city. I can be on land—the change I wanted—without uprooting everything else in my life all at once. I'm ready to continue my movement around the wheel.

I pack my things. I sign a lease for my new home and say goodbye to my apartment, the home I have lived in for some part of my life. I move out of the city into the cabin in the country, a tangible reality in the material world. Solid. Substantial. Manifest. I am in the north—creation/transformation.

I have done it. I have brought my idea around the wheel from *conception*, through *inspiration* and *exploration*, to *creation/transformation*.

Creation always brings change and transformation along with it. There is the transformation of the life I had been living, of course—the death of the old takes place at the same time as the birth of the new—but it is more than that. As soon as my idea is born out of the formless into form, it acquires a life of its own, just as each of us does when we enter into the world of form by being born. Now I have the reality of living in the country, with all its benefits and drawbacks. This is guaranteed to be different from my original idea. Now, whatever it turns out to be, I will experience it, which is the most transformative part—the part from which I will learn the most.

I may love it, I may hate it, or I may feel lukewarm when enough time has passed for me to tell; but I will learn and grow from having risked doing it. I will be more than I was before. I will know myself better. This is natural. There will be many other opportunities to begin again, bringing whatever new tools of knowing my last journey added to my medicine bag. There are different

types of medicine bags. The word "medicine" as it's used here means personal power, spiritual understanding, and lifeskills.

Journeying around the Medicine Wheel of Magic with conscious, creative intent helps you come to realize that you truly matter. Your voice, your presence, who you are, and what you do is important. Your uniqueness adds immeasurably to the whole.

The Seneca Indians teach, as do the Buddhists, that it is your responsibility to discover and develop your gifts and abilities and share them for the benefit of all. This teaching supports the value of time spent tending yourself, and learning what your real rhythms and needs are and what you love to do. Not only is this pleasing and empowering to you, it serves all beings.

Walking in the world as your true self, in your own way, gives you the possibility of experiencing genuine satisfaction—joy. Life can be more exciting and ecstatic, as well as more simple, peaceful, and fun.

You will never lack for challenges in this world, but by celebrating your kinship with the living magic of the elements, you will stay in touch with what is real within and around you. There is great freedom in this. Being in relationship with what exists beyond this lifetime can ground and center you so fully that you can create good relationships with your neighbors, like-minded or not, and engage the life you're living with more trust and less fear.

Always remember that life isn't about practicing magic; practicing magic is about living.

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4 The sheet music for this chant can be found in the appendix on page 223.

PART SIX

Spells

Spells are focused on spelling out what you want or need, and are often quite effective. A spell can bring a magical vibration to your endeavor right from the beginning or, in some instances, a spell is done when you have exhausted all other possibilities. The four

broad, basic steps of a spell are: Conceive it. Craft it. Communicate it. Release it. The fifth step underlies all the others: Know it's possible, so you'll open to receive it.

Spells are focused, and initiated within a ritual setting. When you do a spell, you are claiming your power as co-creative artist of your life. This is good practice for consciously collaborating with the Universe in creating your everyday life too.

One of the differences between a magical spell and a prayer is that in a spell, you are not actually asking; you are invoking and evoking. This is neither asking nor demanding; it is calling forth what you are seeking, and giving thanks for it as if you have already found it, as if whatever you want to happen has already happened. *You are invoking what you want, and evoking the feeling that it has already manifested, by imagining it deeply and kinesthetically* (in your body), *and giving thanks for it*.

Spells work best when done with the deepest gratitude for receiving. Give thanks for all you receive and have. Talk to God—Goddess—All-That-Is about what you want, with the full expectation of receiving exactly that, or *something even greater* that the Universe may have in mind for you. Spells are more about trust than control, more about honing your mind and opening your heart than about controlling your domain.

The Elements in Spell Work—Casting the Circle

The first, essential step in enacting any spell is ritually casting a circle. This form is chosen intentionally as the basic form in which all spiritual, magical work is done. It unites us with the creative elements of which the Universe and we are born, and becomes a living container for that connection. The circle is cast to create a psychic form in which to build energy. To most people, it is an invisible form, yet it is real nonetheless.

The circle is like a cooking pot, the magical cauldron in which you heat and cook your spell. Casting a spell without first casting a circle would be like strewing the ingredients for ten-bean vegetable soup all over your kitchen, and then trying to make the soup without a pot. The circle holds the spell's "ingredients" together, and helps them absorb the heat of your directed

thoughts and energy so they will be shaped and directed into a trance-formation.

Everything in material existence is formed out of our individual and collective thoughts, emotions, projections, and desires. We are always unconsciously manifesting our inner world(s). Magically, we seek to journey to the dimension of creativity itself and consciously create what we think of as external reality. Trance-forms can transform your physical reality.

Sacred space is created for the spell by calling in the spirits of air in the east, fire in the south, water in the west, and earth in the north. The spirits below are called to hold the circle from underneath the visible world, from the underworld or otherworld. The spirits above are called to guide, protect, and watch over the circle. Finally, the Great Mystery (by whatever name) is invoked in the center. This is the same Medicine Wheel of Magic discussed throughout Part V.

You can call the elements silently, or with a moving meditation, or by speaking or singing aloud. You can use your own words, or any of the circle songs or poems in this book. In magic circles, we frequently add this chant. It's sung three times to each direction or element, usually starting with the east or the north:

"Spirits of the Air"(from Uplifting the World by Craig and Star Williams)[5]

Spirits of the air (repeat, changing names of elements or directions),

Carry me home,

Carry me home to myself.

You continue around, chanting to all seven directions, turning to face each one with arms raised and palms facing outward. Kneel on the ground, head down, to invoke below (within). Stand up to raise your arms and face skyward for invoking above (outward). Lastly, with arms loosely down by your sides, open palms are turned to face into the circle to invoke the center, the Great Mystery that can never truly be spoken, where the uniqueness of each person meets the oneness of All-That-Is.

The circle is cast to feel the reality of the elements and their powers around and within you. After each element and direction is called, a candle is lit. Call

to the spirit guardians of each element to come and be with you, to bless and honor your work by becoming part of it and holding their place on the circle or wheel. At the end of your magical work, whether that work was a spell, ritual, meditation, or trance-journey, you open the circle by thanking and releasing the directions and elements in reverse order of how they were called in.

When you are finished and it is time to open your circle, don't blow out the candles that you lit in ritual. When they need to be lit and relit, rather than being allowed to burn all the way down, either put out the candles with a brass snuffer, or wet your fingers and close them around the flame, extinguishing it. This traditional method incorporates all the elements—snuffing out the fire (the flame) and the air (the oxygen that feeds it) with the earth (your thumb and finger) and water (your saliva, herbal tea, or plain water). I reflect on the meaning of each candle for a moment before putting it out.

Breath is used as a tool to charge (energize) and clear (neutralize) sacred objects. It is considered to be blowing your magic away (neutralizing it) if you blow out your candle. On the other hand, for over a year I worked with a remarkable woman who was blind. She was not about to put out her candle with her hand! She decided that each time she blew out a magical candle she was charging her spell or moon intent with her breath, just like blowing out the candles on a birthday cake while silently making a wish.

The circle can become an opening, a portal into the dimension of sheer creativity where all worlds meet. The elements and guardians of the directions mark the boundaries between the worlds of seeming separation and undifferentiated unity. Casting the circle makes it safe to travel between the worlds.

This is the same place that you "go" when you are deeply relaxed, or powerfully threatened, and reach beyond your normal limits. This place yields artistic inspiration, brilliant inventions, superlative athletic achievements, moments of enlightenment, and everyday miracles.

We are in contact with this dimension of beauty all the time. The difference is that in practicing magic, you are slowing down and becoming fully present in order to connect to it with conscious awareness. Trance-formations built within a sacred circle of the elements can help transform a dream to which you are committed into a physical reality.

A trance-formation is an inner structure that you build in a spell or ritual. You create a strong image upon which to concentrate, to help you gather energy and internal focus as well as to stimulate clear and inspired ideas of what outer steps are necessary to achieve your desire. You have to be committed to your own dream; magic can't do that part for you. Magic can help you find and shape your dream, and when you are ready it can help you take your commitment and place it out in the world. But you can't do a spell to get a national tour doing your one-woman show and not be writing (or have written) that show!

You can do the most creative, wonderful spells in the world, but if they're not met with equally elegant efforts in the physical world, they will not work. If you consistently get unclear or negative results from your spell work, look more closely at what beliefs you are challenging. You may need outside help if you have a blind spot you are not acknowledging. Everyone has them, and we all need help to face them sometimes. Once the conflicting belief or feeling is identified, the Burying your Fear Bundle Ritual (this page) or the Releasing Shame Ritual (this page) may be a helpful next step.

Building an Altar

Building an altar is not essential to doing a spell, but it is almost always done. An altar creates a focal point for your energy or the energy of the group. It also gives you something beautiful to place the directional candles on.

Basically, you need a lovely cloth, and a flat surface to spread it over. Once you have put candles for the four directions and the center on the special altar cloth, you have built an altar. Anything more is up to you. Sometimes additional symbols are placed on the altar to represent one or more of the elements. For example:

East—knife, sword, feather, wing, magnifying lens or glass, pen

South—matches, orange flowers, a yellow/orange/red crystal

West—bowl, goblet, or chalice of water; mirror, seashells, salt, river rocks

North—a stone, a bone, a crystal, a pentagram or a seven- or nine-pointed star, a plant, a small tree

Feel free to use any symbols that you choose for your altar items.

When casting a spell, you put your crafted spell and any other relevant sacred items on the altar. These are placed on the altar for some time, ranging from the length of the circle and spell-casting itself to months or even years, depending on the spell.

I have a World Peace and Justice Spell crafted by a group of women as our immediate magical response to the 1991 Gulf War. We crafted a Community Talking Stick for World Council. It is a symbolic stick, too large for real use, based on the Native American tradition of using a talking stick during meetings. Traditionally, the stick is passed around the circle; only the person holding it speaks, while everyone else listens. (I am so grateful for having learned of this tradition. I use a talking stick—or stone, leaf stalk, or other natural object—in all but the largest classes, rituals, and circles. It allows people to learn not only how to listen, but how to ask for attention in a healthy way.)

Now the Community Talking Stick for World Council, along with the Answering Stick made several years later at the instruction of an elder medicine woman, is hanging on a wall of my home as a living altar. I envision the good medicine of this spell continuously traveling out into the world to different nations. Perhaps the sticks will be held quietly, passed from dying peacekeeper to living peacekeeper, to keep the vision of world peace and justice alive until it is finally realized. The altar/spell items can then be released back to the earth at last. Or perhaps they can be useful in some other way. Time will tell.

Generally, most spells will be left out, working on the altar, from three days to several moon cycles. When you cast a spell within a sacred circle, alone or with other people, it is being communicated. It continues to be communicated for whatever length of time your crafted item is left out on your altar, whether you are speaking spell words over it or not. Once you take your working sacred items off the altar, you begin to move into the fourth step —releasing the spell to the earth, to a living body of water, or to fire (which also includes air, as air both feeds the flames and receives the intentions and prayers carried in the smoke as the spell is released). I almost always give back the complete contents of the spell, but not usually the sacred items that were simply "assisting" by being part of the altar.

Many times people create altars that they don't call altars; they call what they're doing decorating. Family photo "shrines" are common forms of sacred

altars in many homes. There are all sorts of altars. I have impromptu blessing altars all over the house. I build them spontaneously anywhere I go, inside and out. On the road, I use my jewelry or scarves—whatever I happen to have with me—or items from nature when I'm outside. Making altars creates beauty and harmony. It's good practice, too, for consciously engaging your magical, metaphorical mind, your eye for seeing meaning and beauty in the midst of the everyday world.

Use mostly natural items on your altar to evoke the sacred, including flowers, fruits, shells, stones, beeswax candles, feathers, favorite jewelry, herbs, crystals, and more. Create at least one sacred haven in your home. A home altar becomes a place where, if only for a moment, you can rest your eye, soothe your mind, and feel at peace.

Back to spells. In *Women Who Run With the Wolves*, Clarissa Pinkola Estés says, "Remember, whatever you are seeking is also seeking you."

The clearer you are in calling to whomever you direct your invocations, the easier it is for what you are calling forth to find you. You have made yourself more receptive to it. Whatever you are dreaming of that has inspired you to craft your spell—whether it's getting a sum of money you need, the wonderful lover you deserve, or helping to pass a resolution that saves the woods and wetlands in your township—you are creating a magnetic resonance in the present that magically attracts what you are calling forth from the future. You begin living in the future/present by inviting yourself to enjoy the feeling, now, that you hope to have more of in the future.

Metaphor and Symbol

Spell work requires symbolic thinking. It's a combination of making mature decisions about what you want, and bringing childlike, artistic playfulness to the process of choosing how to attract it as you plan and craft your spell. In Part IV, Herbal Magic, we looked at the magical gifts and properties of plants and trees metaphorically, and connected those properties with ways they could be used symbolically in spells, rituals, and ceremonial magic.

Candles are another integral part of magical practices. Natural beeswax candles are preferable to petroleum-based candles if you can afford them. I have also recently begun to find soy and palm wax candles, and particularly

like the palm candles. They are less expensive than beeswax, and burn well too. Be mindful to purchase palm candles that are sustainably harvested.

CANDLE COLORS

Here are some symbolic associations, meanings, and magical uses of candles by color:

Black—Trusting the unknown, traveling into the void, dreams and visions, seeking lost objects and/or people, rites of passage, letting go

Blue—Creativity, writing, public speaking, art, intuition, healing, throat chakra

Brown—Earth, soil, finding or selling homes, winning court cases, grounding and centering

Gold—Abundance, solar energy, celebration, prosperity, psychic connectedness between the earth and the spirits above

Gray—Friendship; entering into the otherworld

Green—Abundance, prosperity, healing, physical connection with the earth; plants, love, generosity, gratitude, heart chakra

Orange—Sex, vibrancy, fertility, virility, health; letting go of addictions; strengthening immunity; second chakra

Pink—Self-love, universal love, joy, gratitude, heart chakra

Purple—Spirit manifested on Earth; protection, leadership, spiritual strength; seeing through illusion and limitation; marking someone's death/spirit journey; crown chakra

Red—Love, sex, passion, romance, vital energy, womb wisdom, security, survival, root chakra

Silver—Lunar energy, healing, celebration, moon wisdom, mystery, connectedness with the cosmos, cosmic origins

Violet/Lavender—Peace, meditation, intuitive wisdom; first-eye and crown chakras

Yellow—Confidence, optimism, personal power, wealth, intelligence, learning, third chakra (solar plexus)

White—Can be used for anything, including: gratitude, healing innocence, marking death and/or birth

There is no such thing as a "wrong" color to use. Trust your instincts.

You can use both physical and imagined symbols to represent what you are calling forth, and as a point of focus that helps evoke and direct your intent, concentration, feelings, and magical/creative energy. A spell incorporates conscious use of the imagination, and then adds the dimension of crafting a physical item to be a container for the creative life energy you are stirring with your spell.

HOME SPELLS

I've moved many times, and I always use a brown candle to find a home. I put my spell candle in the north, the place of manifestation. Brown represents the earth, the land on which my new home will sit. I feel that the plants and trees on the land will hear me calling, and respond. I also call on Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, because the house that will become my home is very important to me, too.

I have had incredibly good fortune finding the most magical apartments and houses, so I recommend starting with the following four steps:

1. Write down and/or draw all the things you want in your new home, including what it will cost, and when you need it. If more than one of you is doing this, you'll need to combine your lists and make sure they're compatible. This list will go on your altar under your spell candle.

2. Get a beautiful brown candle to light for your spell.

3. Call on Hestia to help you find your perfect new home. Thank her for it right away, already starting to imagine that you are there, or at least that you've signed your lease or contract.

4. Do your spell work by lighting your candle in a sacred circle and invoking your home with a simple chant or rhyme. Here's one:

   Dear Hestia, I call on you who tends the hearth flames:

I want to get settled and no longer have to roam;

Please illuminate my path and guide me to my home.

When the spell is finished, you have to let it go completely, surrendering any sense of waiting or expectation that would keep you from living in the present and taking practical steps toward what you desire.

Of course you also have to read the ads, or call the agents, or put up flyers and go out to look at houses or apartments. You don't do a magical spell and then sit home and wait for the phone to ring! Also, remember that how you dispose of your spell is the completion of it. It is as important as all the parts that come before. You give away any remnants of your spell to earth, water, or fire and air, with trust and appreciation for the wonderful gift you are sure to be receiving.

When I am all moved in, I light a thank-you candle (of whatever color appeals to me) to the Goddess for my perfect new home. I then bury all my spell remnants in the earth near my new home.

I recall one student using a sweet bird's nest she found as the physical, symbolic foundation of her spell to find a cozy new home. She put symbols of everything she'd decided was most important to her into the bird's nest. She put in matches representing a good stove to keep her home warm in the cold, northern winters. A little earth went in there so that the new apartment would be within walking distance of a park. Whatever she didn't have room for, or a good symbol of, she wrote on a piece of paper. Finally, she put the list in the nest too.

She brought her finished spell, the "furnished" nest representing her new home, into a magic circle. All the women blessed her new home when she placed it on the altar in the east. She put it in the east for two reasons—first, to symbolize the direction in which she was literally moving, and second, as the place where the sun rises; metaphorically, it is the direction of new beginnings.

Her spell worked. She gave thanks and then burned her home spell—the bird's nest with all its "furnishings," and her candle drippings—as soon as she found her new home. When you burn your spell you are releasing it to the fire and the air, since fire needs air to burn, and the resulting smoke rises into the air.

You can find lists of symbols in some magic books, but most important is that the symbols make sense to you and your unique situation, and that you connect with them mentally and emotionally.

For another example, my friend Deborah always uses an orange candle to find a new home when she moves, and she has moved several times since I've known her. To Deborah, orange is the color of the hearth, and the hearth is her symbol of home. She probably puts her spell candle in the south, for fire, no matter where she's going. When she moved from New York to San Francisco, she went on short notice and with a small salary to complete her medical residency. She and her husband landed a dream apartment, at a great price, as soon as she arrived. Most people would say that this is not possible in San Francisco! She gratefully released her spell into the ocean.

Practicing magic is an art and, as with any art, you get better at all aspects of it the more wholeheartedly you engage your skills and the longer you practice it. Also, as with any art, the more you practice, the more mistakes you're likely to make! This is one of the places where it helps to have a good sense of humor. Humor helps you trust your timing rather than being impatient and judgmental with yourself.

It may be unfortunate, but it is nonetheless true, that you have to learn some things the hard way.

Do's and Don'ts of Love Spells

A guy named Tim learned a little magic and decided to do a spell to win the affection of a young woman he had been eyeing. It worked. Ironically, it worked too well for his taste, and he lamented ever having done the spell. He complained about having her, in much the same way that he'd complained about not having her before.

"I got her, but now I can't get rid of her," he sighed. There's truth to the old saying, "Be careful what you ask for—you just might get it."

I counsel people not to do spells directed toward a particular individual, but rather to invoke the qualities that you are looking for in a lover or life partner. It is less manipulative, and you can still be clear and specific. Those who disagree with this thinking point out that a spell can only help with the initial getting-together. The man or woman who did the magic still has to do

whatever is necessary to have a genuine relationship, if that's what the person wants. I think it is all too easy to project unreal qualities onto someone you are attracted to. Sex and love spells work best, with the least uncomfortable repercussions, when done with trust that the right person will respond if you let him or her make that choice freely.

One man I know very well called out to the Universe for a woman full of magic. Little did he know what he'd invoked—he got me! Four years later, we joined our lives together.

A FULL MOON SPELL FOR TRUE LOVE

Roses are wonderful for love magic. I use red and pink roses: the flowers invite beauty and sexuality; leaves nourish strength and friendship; the hips—fruit that contains the seeds—stand for continuity over time; and the thorns for mutual respect, protection, and maintaining healthy personal boundaries. Rose opens the mind, heart, body, and spirit to love and pleasure.

Put all the dried ingredients together in a brightly colored bag, or a deep-red one. You can add anything else you want, such as items symbolizing the particular qualities you are invoking. Perhaps you want to write the names of the happiest, most committed lovers you know, to illustrate what true love looks like to you, and put the piece of paper in the bag. You can add other herbs too, as described in Part IV. If you like, decorate the outside of the bag.

On the night before the full moon, place your love spell and a red or rose-pink candle on your altar. Write down the qualities you are looking for in your man or woman on a beautiful piece of paper. (You'll probably want to have prepared a rough draft of this earlier.) Put that on the altar, too. Love goddesses are always attracted to expressions of beauty and creativity. You might want to put a mirror on your altar, too. The goddesses are happy to see their own beauty when they come to help you.

Create a ritual circle by calling in the elements and the seven directions. Next, call on the goddess of your choice, perhaps Greek Goddess Aphrodite or African Goddess Oshun. Read your list of qualities you are invoking, out loud the first night, and silently or aloud on the subsequent nights. Ask her to send you the true love you are asking for by the new moon that follows the next one (in six weeks). Choose any amount of time you want, if the timing I suggest doesn't fit. Be realistic. You have to know that what you're invoking is

possible, in order for spell work to help you manifest (or womanifest) your dreams. Create or copy a rhyming spell that is short and sweet, such as:

> Aphrodite, send to me,
> The one who'll set my loving free,
> The one who is my destiny,
> The one who's calling you for me.

Light your candle and repeat your spell aloud three times. When you are ready, put out your candle, either with your fingers or with a candlesnuffer, and open (release) the circle by thanking—silently or out loud—the directions in the reverse order of how they were called. Do this for three nights, before, during, and after the full moon. On the last night, burn the paper. Collect the ashes and release your spell and all its remnants into a living, flowing body of water as soon as possible. Now, give thanks once more, then let go and trust. Open your heart to the love that is present within and all around you. Don't wait to share your love!

A WAXING CRESCENT MOON SPELL FOR A LOVER

You are not necessarily looking for a long-term relationship. Sometimes you simply want to be with a wonderful person to share a good time together. Rose has a very exciting grandmother who is especially good at calling forth this energy. Her name is Grandmother Hawthorn, and like her granddaughter Rose, she is very beautiful. Most importantly, she is happy to help you in such significant matters as love and sex.

Hawthorn is a tree that is skinny and gnarly, and has frighteningly long, sharp thorns, so that at first glance you might not realize how sexual she actually is. Her flowers, though, give her away. They blossom abundantly in the merry month of May, and the scent of musky, sexual juiciness floats lazily on the breeze, causing spring fever to rise in those around her.

Gather or purchase hawthorn flowers, and when you can see the waxing moon in the sky, it is time to do your spell. It is up to you how simple or elaborate you feel like making any spell. The sincerity of your intent is always the most important factor. The symbols you use do matter, but it is wise not to confuse a symbol with whatever it is representing.

Artemis, the archer, is a virgin goddess connected with the new moon and the waxing crescent moon. She is also known as Diana, the huntress. She is a wonderful goddess to call on for this spell because she is physically vital, sexual, and unattached to any man or woman. The original meaning of the word "virgin" refers to a woman who is owned by no one but herself.

You could also choose to call on lusty Pan, the god of healthy, sexual, male vitality. He certainly needs to be reclaimed from having been falsely turned into the devil! You can also simply direct any spell to the Universe or All-That-Is.

Make a pot of hawthorn flower infusion by pouring boiling water over one ounce (about one and a half cups) of dried flowers in a quart container. Steep, covered, anywhere from two hours to overnight. Drink your tea, sweetened with honey if you like; you can lick the honey off your finger to make your spell even sexier and put yourself in the right frame of mind. Light a bright orange or red candle. Meditate, imagining that you have already found the lover you are seeking. Choose a time frame in which you expect your new lover to manifest in your life, such as by the next new or full moon, for instance. Then, when you feel ready, say a simple rhyming spell that you have created or copied. Say it aloud nine times, even if you are alone. Here's one:

> Dearest Artemis,
>
> Thank you for sending a lover my way
>
> Who wants to love me for today,
>
> And knows that sex is sacred play.

Finish your tea, and let your candle burn all the way down. Toss the spent flowers and candle drippings into a living body of flowing water, or bury them in the earth. Give your thanks once more, then let go and trust. Open your senses to the sensual and sexual life force at play—in your food, your body, your friendships, your garden—in everything. Enjoy!

By the way, hawthorn can also help renew a long-term relationship if the sexual magic within it has waned, or even if it hasn't. Share hawthorn flower infusion with each other. Include the berries, because they increase circulation and stamina. They also nourish the heart. Ask the spirit of Grandmother Hawthorn to revisit your relationship as you drink the delicious tea together.

Make sure you leave yourselves time after the tea to enjoy her magically sensual, sexual gifts.

The Ethics of Magic

We're taught either to defend,
Or "better" yet, to overpower.
Why not develop your gifts?
That's how you plug into power.
It's free and it's flowing
Toward the greatest good.
Freedom comes when this is understood.

Real Magic is about creating, not about control and manipulation. Manipulative magic is against the natural flow of the freely spiraling universe, and works against life. I describe manipulative magic as focused on influencing someone else for the express purpose of your own satisfaction. It is selfish behavior. It is childish, too, and can be dangerous. It is profoundly different from encouraging something to happen the way you think you want it to.

Moment to moment, though, it's a judgment call, and inevitably some truths are learned the hard way, by making mistakes. I have it on good authority that this will continue to be true no matter how old or wise you get! If, however, you acknowledge your errors and self-deceptions with compassion and honest remorse, and develop the ability to laugh at yourself, your discernment grows keener. Your magical work grows clearer and stronger, particularly if you also make amends to anyone you have wronged.

I remember auditioning for a community production of the play *Butterflies Are Free* when I was in my late teens. I passionately wanted to play the leading role that Goldie Hawn played in the movie. I worked hard, and was told I had a good a chance of getting the part after the audition, but I wanted to ensure being chosen.

It never occurred to me that what I decided to do was invasive and unethical. I thought it was magical wishful thinking, but it was more than that. Every night before I fell asleep, I would imagine the director sound asleep, open, and impressionable. I would journey to her as if I were a butterfly, gently flapping my wings open and closed next to one of her ears. I was whispering to her, "Cast Robin in the part; cast Robin in the part. She's the best one to play it." When I was satisfied that my message had been received, I'd fly home and go to sleep.

I got the call confirming I'd gotten the part on my birthday. I was thrilled. I had gotten what I wanted. Rehearsals began well, at first, but then something began to go wrong. The director was confused, I was confused and frustrated, and we began to experience a lot of tension between us. It was not good. I left the cast, by our mutual decision, not long before opening night.

I was angry, felt like a terrible failure, and was ashamed of myself for having let everyone down. I suspect I must have been nursing a gnawing suspicion that it had something to do with what I'd done to "help" myself get the part, though I can't honestly remember when the connection dawned on me consciously. I tried to blame the director for not being good enough. I resented her for depriving me of my chance to shine. But I knew something was "off," and that I had helped generate a difficult situation for everyone involved. It felt freeing to acknowledge that, if only to myself.

I came to the performance on opening night, and wished everyone a great show. That was the best I could do. In retrospect, I can see that I was petrified to play the part. At that age, I was too self-conscious and physically inhibited.

At the time, the teaching I'd received seemed harsh. I had a bitter taste in my mouth, and shame in my being that seemed like it wouldn't ever go away. It was actually a relatively gentle teaching on a most important subject. All of us are capable of letting selfishness and poor judgment tangle us in our own webs. We all have delusions and anger and greed. However, when you nourish your true nature and let it shine, and nourish your connection with nature, you not only know yourself better, you feel more fulfilled. You no longer feel as blindly compelled to feed the greedy parts of yourself. You would rather feed your generosity and gratitude—there's a lot more joy in that.

Though what I did wasn't exactly a spell, it easily could have been. It was close enough. Much later, I learned a few important things about magic and about life—to respect other people's free will and personal space and, more and

more, to trust the Universe. I sent the director a heartfelt apology on the same spirit wings that had carried my manipulative message before. I offered it freely, with no ulterior motive or expectation. I was not asking for forgiveness or anything else. I was simply doing what I could to redress the wrong. Whether she accepted it or not was up to her. For me, it brought closure to my emotional shame and to my original, ill-advised spell: conceived, crafted, communicated, released.

I read a story about a witch in Hungary who used the kind of magic I described to influence someone, but for a much, much different purpose. She was jailed for sabotage after making an honest mistake. The situation was terrible, and completely unjust. It was a matter of life and death, and her defense, though true, was very weak. Her daughter, Z. Budapest, writes in *Grandmother of Time:*

> She resorted to her witchcraft, which she used only in times of trouble when the chips were down or when somebody's life was in danger. We had about as much hope as a mouse in the throat of a snake.... Masika traveled astrally to the bedroom of each official who was to sit in judgment on her the next day ... broke into their minds, telling these men to remember her and listen to her story, which was she'd made a mistake, an honest mistake, and she was sorry.... It worked. They acquitted Masika and sent her home.... We had never heard of a case when somebody actually beat the rap. We had thought we would never see her again. It was a miracle!

The worst kind of magical work is aimed at "getting someone back" for something they did to you or someone you love—"making them pay." That type of magic, commonly called revenge, is extremely harmful to the one enacting it. It costs the doer, no matter how justifiable her rage, bitterness, or grief, far more than it costs the intended target.

Magic that invokes protection, self-love, and justice—whether legal, personal, or cosmic—yields far more satisfying and beneficial results. Magic is a natural

creative force in the Universe. Practicing magic requires drawing in and on all that is sacred. Practicing it in ways that are abusive or exploitative goes against the reality that we are all interconnected, and the spell will boomerang badly—if not at first, then eventually. Whatever kind of magic you practice will always come back to you with more force than it contained when you originally sent it out.

The basic tenet of magic is that whatever you put out comes back to you three times over, at least! Some traditions teach that whatever you put out comes back to you seven or ten times over. Think carefully about how you use your focused energy, because you are powerful. My first spiritual teacher often repeated, "Remember, whatever you send out, you're just sending the carbon copy. You keep the original." I've always remembered that.

We all know the maxim, "What goes around, comes around," as well as the familiar biblical saying, "As you sow, so shall you reap," and the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I'm not generally a big fan of rules, but I make an exception for this one!

When I'm questioning whether something I intend to do is manipulative, controlling, or selfish, that's the teaching I weigh it against. Would I be happy if this energy were being directed toward me? Would I like having its original thought-form impressed into my being? If I'm still uncertain because my emotions are involved or it's an ethically tricky situation, I ask myself, "Am I willing to accept the consequences of having the intent I'm sending out powerfully returned to me three times over?"

I once had a neighbor who was doing mean and hateful things like leaving anonymous and vaguely threatening notes taped to my apartment door, suggesting that I should move. I knew who it was immediately, and that direct confrontation would get us nowhere. Over time, I tried everything I could think of to communicate with her, to offer healing, friendship, and a willingness to listen to whatever was really on her mind. I tried in person and, when that failed, I tried psychically. If we couldn't talk woman-to-woman, maybe we could talk soul-to-soul. I sent love to what I perceived as the wounded parts of her being and tried everything I knew of to psychically protect my home. It would work for a little while, but if I left home for a couple of days, her cowardly, hostile behavior would resume.

I had never done a spell directed against anyone before, but I was at my wit's end. I was concerned for my peace of mind and safety—and that of the

man I was then married to. I felt our home was threatened. I considered directing a spell against her, but felt there must be another way. I thought long and hard before finally deciding that I would craft a spell to neutralize any bad energy she was sending to us and into our home. It was not against her; it was for my household.

I was focused primarily on protection of my home, my sacred space. I was certainly willing to have that original thought-form impressed into my being and returned to me three times over. Regarding neutralizing the effect of her intent and actions, I decided that if at some time in the future I was behaving as she was, or even if I was manipulating someone for what I saw as "their own good," I was willing to accept having my spell's medicine returned to me and my efforts neutralized.

SPELL TO NEUTRALIZE BAD INTENTIONS AND ACTIONS

Although I always cast a circle when crafting a spell bag, and am very careful to stay totally focused on what I am doing, I was particularly mindful with this spell. Don't talk about other things while you are doing even a single stitch of your bag! Whatever you are thinking and talking about while you are working will go into your spell. A spell bag can be energetically fragmented and divided due to random talk, and can lose much of its potential power before you've even begun. In this case, I kept checking in to make sure I was focused on self-respect and protection, not revenge, and that I was genuinely working to neutralize and/or redirect her energy, not trying to get back at her with her own bad medicine.

I put quite a number of things into the bag. Here are the most important ones:

Garlic Powder—To repel, and as an antidote for poison, to keep away a person behaving maliciously

Poke Berries—To invoke my own Spiritual Warrior energy and stimulate my powers of protection

Charcoal Powder—To neutralize poison and excess acid/rage

Bittersweet Nightshade Berries—Not poisonous, but generally considered to be; and they are so striking to look at that they make

you take a step back. In this case, I didn't mind if my neighbor got the idea that it might be dangerous to keep doing what she was doing.

Rue—This herb is a traditional Mayan remedy for envidia ("envy"), a condition that can arise when physical and psychological symptoms of ill health are caused by another's envy malevolently directed toward you. I had no health symptoms, but preventative medicine seemed like a good idea since envy seemed to be part of the problem.

Witch Hazel leaves and twigs—An ally of mine for protection, especially connected with homes

A Royal Azel stone—This purple stone is better known as sugilite. It is powerful and precious for healing and for manifesting Spirit on Earth.

The royal azel stone I put in the red bag was deep purple, tall, sharp, and pointy. I loved it, and therefore knew it was particularly meaningful for the spell. I felt that I needed to make a special sacrifice for this spell, using the original meaning, "to make sacred." I wanted to let the Goddess know how serious I was in my desire for this unwanted attention to be stopped once and for all. I was also putting my deepest desire for the woman's eventual awakening deep inside the healing stone.

That part was never spoken aloud to anyone, until now.

I sewed the bag, over time, sipping bitter, woman-strengthening teas such as cronewort leaves or yarrow flowers. It is sweet to claim one's personal power, but bitter to have to do it in circumstances such as this, where neighbors can't live in peace. I thought about the meaning of what I was doing, and pictured it working brilliantly, her energy being swept past my door, unable to touch me or anything or anyone inside.

I threw my spell bag into the river and visualized her actions being taken past my door without stopping, as the current of the river flowed ceaselessly out to the ocean. I cast this spell in silence, with a few women I had chosen to bear witness as the bag was taken further and further away by the river. It was an initiation into claiming a different aspect of power, and accepting deeper responsibility than simply asking for something I wanted.

The neighbor didn't bother us again after that.

I later realized that the woman was also a messenger from the Universe: I *did* need to get out of the apartment, and the marriage. And not long after this

adventure, I did, in the story I told at the end of Part V.

More Do's and Don'ts of Spells

Spells aimed at manifesting something are usually best done for yourself, rather than for someone else, especially when you are new at practicing magic. It's often hard enough to know exactly what *you* really want at any given moment, much less what anyone else wants. Doing spells for other people can easily entangle you in situations that are not your own and, unless you are highly practiced, can bring complications that you surely don't need. It's also more transformative to recover magic for your own self.

Every act, magical or otherwise, brings consequences. Spell work can be very helpful in developing and fine-tuning your personal sense of honor, integrity, and ethics. Power is best used to serve, not rule. Magic practiced with an open hand and an open heart is the best kind of magic. Invoke exactly what you want, and then trust what you receive. You will always get what you need.

It doesn't matter whether you ask the Universe, the Goddess, God, Spirit, Energy, Creator, All-That-Is, the Life Force, Divine Power, synchronicity, or the Tao. Just know that placing your absolute trust in it encourages the most wonderful magic to happen. Besides, "it" is wiser than you or I, and far more powerful—and will always get the final word every time, anyway!

Spells can be done alone, or by a group of people coming together to create a magical energy field. By calling the elements into a sacred circle and working within a supportive group, each individual's personal magical focus can be further strengthened, as in the Wish Bag Spell (this page). People can gather with one united intention for everyone in the group, as in the Pouring Money Spell (this page). Lastly, and perhaps most intriguingly for recovering Healing Magic in the everyday world, a group can gather with a united desire that is focused on social justice, as in the Stop the Attacker Spell (this page).

You could say that spells are a way of dramatizing your prayers, praises, intentions, desires, and commitments—making them beautiful, touching, and exciting. Spells can be quite serious when the occasion warrants it, and at other times they can be a lot of fun to dream up and enact. Sometimes, they can be both. Spells are rewarding whether or not they are "successful," and

unexpected results are sometimes even more valuable than the ones you'd envisioned.

Spells, like all authentic magic, always lead to self-revelation. If you are a willing student, your spells can teach you helpful things about the beliefs and feelings you hold about yourself, about other people, and about how the Universe works. Your beliefs are not necessarily true. The key is this: if you discover that your beliefs—true or false—support and encourage your growing freedom, joy, and creativity, let them be, at least for now. If you discover that your beliefs are limiting your full, joyous participation in life, you can be quite sure they are illusory. Be willing to let them change with the help of magic.

When you *believe* something, or *believe in* something, you have already separated yourself from it. This is different from what you *know*. You can only *know* what you are in intimate relationship with, something of which you are part. I don't *believe* in magic, I *know* magic. We *are* magic.

Spell Bags

Spell bags are a favorite form for spells and lucky charms, and can be used for personal pleasures, for safety, and for times when the odds are against you and your need is profound. In one example, you might really want to see your favorite band playing in town. Although the concert has been sold out for two months, you're going to work on getting tickets magically by creating a lucky charm. It's very exciting, but it's not truly important to your life.

In a more serious situation, perhaps you craft your spell bag because you are fighting to keep custody of your children in a legal battle where you are up against abusive use of money and/or connections. Or you might craft a spell bag for a physical/spiritual healing, or to help release an addiction. Spell bags could be used in any of these situations, and more.

Please remember that it is never an either/or situation, where you either do magic or take action. Practicing Healing Magic nourishes and strengthens imagination and visioning. Inner work is potent, but must be followed up with creative action in the outer ("real") world. It is always both/and—and timing is everything. Learn to trust your instincts about when to move

magically in the energetic realms and when to act practically in the physical world.

WISH BAG SPELL

Choose or craft a muslin, silk, or cotton bag that you can decorate inside and out. Fill it with items to symbolize and represent your specific wish. Use items from nature: leaves, flowers, seeds, roots, stones, crystals, feathers, essential oils, and anything else you like, perhaps something written on paper. Women can add at least one drop of moon blood, physically or psychically, as the last ingredient. This is true for any spell. Men can add a red leaf or flower, a red silk cord, or a small red piece of fabric, to symbolize the magical, life-forming powers of menstrual blood. Postmenopausal women (of any age) don't need to do this. Your wise blood energy is always present.

Close the wish bag with a drawstring. You can even sew it closed for certain spells—you'll have to choose what's best. Again, think metaphorically and symbolically; do whichever feels right. You can also write your own spell words, specific to your situation. The words you choose are very important, and have to feel real and alive to you. Remember that you always want to be going toward something more than you are running away from something. More on language will follow.

Here is an open incantation (feel free to adapt it for yourself):

> This wish of mine is now a dream
> Held dearly in my heart.
> It's crafted in trust and beauty,
> And that is just the start.
> With deep thanks I send this wish to you,
> Knowing now it will come true.

Pick out a specific candle with which you want to cast your spell. If you like, you can use the point of a knife or other sharp object to scratch a word or symbol that represents your wish into the candle.

You can dedicate your wish to the Fates, the Goddess, God, or whomever you choose. You can also pick a specific goddess, such as Lakshmi for wealth,

Brigid for healing and/or creative inspiration, or perhaps a god such as Ganesh to remove obstacles.

Place your wish bag on your altar with your candle and any other sacred objects you want present. Cast your spell by lighting your candle and chanting the wish chant aloud, three, seven, or nine times. The timing of this spell may be determined by the nature of what you are invoking or asking help to release.

Generally speaking, invoking spells are most effective when done during the waxing moon, or around the full moon, while banishing and releasing spells are best done while the moon is waning and, most powerfully, just before the dark moon. You could connect your wish spell to your new moon intent, and chant it from one new moon to the next. You could chant it for three nights, from the night before to the night after the full moon. You might choose a specific Earth holiday to cast a particular spell, such as Spring Equinox for a spell focused on rebirthing a part of yourself that has been hidden underground for a long time.

Perhaps you simply cast your spell within the ritual circle of directions and elements, and chant it aloud one time with all your heart.

Remember, always begin a spell by casting the circle and end by opening it —thanking the directions and elements in reverse order of how they were called. You can choose to leave a spell out on your altar for any length of time you decide, even well beyond the time when you incant your spell with words. In all cases, make sure that you are still "working" the magic with your attentiveness and energy. Don't let energy drain out of your spell because you haven't made the time to release your wish bag back to the elements yet. Conceive it. Craft it. Communicate it. Release it. At every stage, from beginning to end, remain consciously open to receive your wish, without "thinking" about it once you've released your spell.

Money and Wealth Spells

There is no question that, in our culture, the strain and stress of not having enough money to buy food, pay rent, or take your child to a doctor or other health-care practitioner, much less not being able to buy all the toys you want, makes it hard to feel abundance. Financial poverty and hunger support the

illusion of scarcity—the carefully cultivated deception that our world doesn't have enough prosperity and abundance to go around.

Yet it is also true that no amount of financial prosperity in this world can make up for not being able to feel satisfied and fulfilled, or to experience love and genuine gratitude. Gratitude is a constant ingredient in spells and other magical workings.

Gratitude is a highly underrated emotion. True gratitude fills the heart with a deliciously happy feeling. We tend to save up our gratitude for special occasions, hoarding it as if we don't have enough to go around. Most people are rushing around too much to remember to be grateful for an ordinary moment of life—for having a friend or relative who loves you, for having enough food to eat, for your breath flowing in and out. This is not emotional manipulation as in, "You should be grateful for what I'm doing for you." Authentic appreciation doesn't have room for feelings of indebtedness or entrapment. True gratitude is so fulfilling that it overflows. The Seneca teachers say, "People think we're praying in ceremony, but what we're actually doing is praising, giving thanks."

When you ask for something in a magical spell, you give thanks for receiving it. This helps create a vibration that magnetizes and draws in the things you need. There *is* enough to go around. Ongoing ecological destruction, and the denial of access to basic resources experienced by more and more people, haven't changed that.

Wealth can manifest as money, or it can come in other forms—some direct, some indirect. It is helpful to be open to different ways that prosperity and abundance may appear, and not limit them to money. What specific dream are you envisioning, what plan are you invoking, when you do a magical spell? When you stir up creative energy, something always happens. Thinking about the spell and letting it come together in your imagination is part of creating it; conceiving it is the invisible part of crafting it. With a group, you always talk it through, too.

One evening in magic class, we gathered in our circle to do a Wealth spell from *Jambalaya* by Luisah Teish, which includes the following chant from Raymond Buckland's *The Magick of Chant-O-Matics:*

POURING MONEY SPELL

Out of the nowhere,
Out of the air,
Out of the darkness,
To aid me, I swear!
Pile upon pile
Of silver, of gold
Come without warning,
As you have been told!

When we discussed this chant, we discovered that none of us were completely comfortable with it exactly as written. We all felt that receiving and sharing were linked for us, and that invoking or calling forth in gratitude worked better for us than demanding and commanding. Eventually, our extremely similar but adapted version went like this:

Out of the nowhere,
Out of the air,
Out of the darkness
To aid me, to share,
Pile upon pile
Of silver, of gold
Come in to bless me,
Abundance ninefold!

We did the heart of the spell as it was written, adding some of our own creative and cultural touches here and there. We cast the circle under the waxing moon, and called on an ancient Celtic Earth goddess known as Habondia, Goddess of abundance, who is said to hold witches in her special favor. We placed a green pillar candle in the center of the altar, with our chosen symbol of abundance and prosperity next to it, as instructed. We used the Field of Plenty card from *The Sacred Path Cards* deck by Jamie Sams. This Native American image depicts a cornucopia overflowing with a rich autumn harvest of fruits and vegetables.

We had each brought a number of coins with us, some of them valuable or sentimental. Most were simply pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters, as the spell calls for "the change you have in your pockets." We also brought stones, crystals, and other small, natural items of wood or metal for our own various reasons. One by one, we added our treasures and coins into a large bowl of fresh water.

We passed two bowls, one full of money and one empty, around the circle: One woman would pour the heavy bowl full of coins, treasures, and water into an empty bowl being held by the sister on her right, who would pour out the full bowl into the now-empty bowl, which had been passed along to the woman to her right, continuing around the circle. We chanted our wealth chant again and again until the bowls were passed all the way around the circle, and everyone had both poured out and received the wealth. Teish says there has to be an even number of participants, and to make sure each one says the chant at least eight times—the number that looks like the infinity symbol.

We then put a rose of Jericho into the bowl of water. This is also called a resurrection flower because the dry flower is closed and dead-looking, but when you set it in water, it opens, coming back to vibrant life before your eyes. We decided to expand the spell by re-enacting the pouring-money part for the next three weeks. The moon waxed and then waned as we gathered once a week, cast a ritual circle, and poured the money. We would then go on to other work. When we left the women's center each night, we left the full, green-glass bowl on the floor near the front door, as Teish instructs.

We decided that we wanted to give our spell back to the source as a group, and that we would ceremonially pour out the bowl of water and money, "pearls," crystals, and other sacred trinkets to feed Mother Earth who holds and generates all riches. The part of the earth we chose was the Hudson River. We walked west toward the river, and then spontaneously headed south to choose a place for our offering. A little ways away, we saw signs that said "Spirit Cruises." Perfect!

We quietly, almost invisibly, cast our circle and then released our spell into the river. We gave our thanks, opened the circle, and walked to our respective buses, subways, and cars. One woman took the empty bowl to wash and return to the women's center the following week. The spell's form was now released, and it was time for us to let go of any expectations and get on with our lives.

Whenever you are overly focused on the results of a personal or group spell, you block the natural flow of energy and work against yourself. This is hard to accept, but true. It's simple, really; it has everything to do with being fully present to what is, rather than being fixated on what may or may not happen. This is simple to say, but not so easy to do. Breathe consciously, and pay attention. Like every practice, it begins with making a decision to wake up, to be fully alive. This choice, of necessity, gets made over and over again. It is, ultimately, a lifelong practice, and highly worthwhile.

Over the next few weeks and months, amazing things happened within the group. One freelance worker in a challenging dry spell suddenly got more and more work. An artist who hadn't sold any of her noncommercial work in a few years received several inquiries and sold two of her paintings. One woman in the group announced that she was getting a new computer through her job, and had a laptop to give away. A laptop computer was exactly what I most wanted!

The list goes on: Another woman who was really broke got offered a new and exciting job. She came in the next week and, with a mischievous smile and a dramatic flourish, put a $20,000 check down on our altar. We were stunned. She laughed and explained that she had received the payment from a previous job. The company had gone out of business owing all the employees long-awaited paychecks. She had let go of any hope that she would ever see the back pay they owed her. Just in case you're wondering—yes, the check cleared.

This type of spell-work, practiced in a healthy way, is fun, rewarding, and encourages us to shift our world view from "scarcity consciousness" to "abundance mind," as Dhyani Ywahoo so beautifully puts it.

Language

Words are not ultimately the most effective way to communicate, but for the moment they're still one of the best methods we have. Words matter. Arguments can erupt over whether a distinction is important or just semantics. Arguing semantics can be a game of cleverness that causes confusion and confounds communication. Distinctions, though, are valuable when they reshape or clarify the meaning of a word, phrase, or expression.

In the Medicine Wheel of Magic, words live in the east, the direction of the mind and the dawning light of understanding. Words can be used to confuse, obfuscate and dominate. They can be manipulative, dishonest, and damaging to genuine communication (truthfulness). Consider political speeches, advertising/public relation pitches, and everyday lies. Lying is very popular, but it's a misguided use of words. We use words to hide ourselves. We use words wastefully, like too many other things.

Words can be used as tools, like the sculptor hammer that chips away all the stone that does not belong until the true image is revealed and its truth can be shared. Words are the knife or sword that cuts through illusion and unreality to get to the truth; the pen and voice are instruments of discernment. Words reveal your unique perspective, and help you share your specific perception.

You need to learn to trust how you see. Trust it, not when you are under the influence of the cultural trance—lethargically watching television, for example, or being overstimulated by sexy billboard ads—but when you are fully present and engaged. It is very helpful in spell work to be as unambiguous as possible about what you are calling forth with your words. Be definitive yet open, and you can expect clearer results.

I like to keep most of my spell invocations rhyming, or at least poetic, and I like to keep them short. I favor two- to eight-line incantations.

EVOLUTION OF AN UNEXPECTED GROUP SPELL—A STORY

It was the first Monday night of a new Magic class series. We gathered in a circle, mostly sitting on cushions on the carpeted floor, with a few of us in chairs. There were some women I barely knew, some who'd been taking magic classes with me for about a year, some who had worked magically on their own but never in a group before, and one young woman who had never been to anything like this before. She had taken an herb class with me and liked it.

Normally the first class would be gentle and meditative, light and fun. Time would be spent beginning to get to know each other. I'd set the groundwork, talk about the Medicine Wheel of Magic, and the elements and directions. We would begin to build a foundation of trust, as we would be spending three months together, meditating with the cycles of the moon, crafting spells, and creating rituals. We would be exploring the heart and soul of practicing magic

within a supportive, loving circle of women, and cultivating our strength and humor.

This Monday night was different. Fear was in the pulse of the city, along with rage, despair, hatred, and a palpable feeling of powerlessness. We had brought it into the room with us too. Everybody was talking about the recent brutal assault against a woman walking through Central Park one afternoon the week before. The media was covering it incessantly. A woman in Yonkers was beaten the same way a day later, but much less media attention was given to what had happened to her. We acknowledged with anger and grief that it was likely because she was a woman of color. Too often that's the case, when one violent crime is covered and another just like it is not. Then a well-liked woman who owned a neighborhood dry-cleaning store on Manhattan's Upper East Side, near where I was living, was murdered. Her killing was linked to the same criminal. Once again, no motive was apparent.

What was going on? The feeling of being endangered and unsafe was tightening its grip around women all over the city. I knew if I didn't address this, it would be pulling at our psyches, even if we pushed it onto the back burner of our minds while we went about other business. So, with only a short time spent on preliminaries and introductions, we discussed it, and everyone agreed to my new plan. We would cast a group spell that very night to stop the attacker and see him brought to justice.

Well, almost everyone agreed. Lisa, who'd been studying magic with me for about a year, balked. She said she didn't want to do this kind of magic, that it scared her and she felt it was manipulative. I saw taut lines of tension forming on her forehead as her jaw set determinedly. Yet, an aura of confusion and helplessness emanated from her. She wanted to understand how or why this could be okay for her to do. The next moment, one of the other women suggested doing a binding spell, which is a spell to bind an enemy. Lisa's voice went up half an octave as she responded, "I'm not doing a binding spell! I'm definitely not comfortable with binding!"

It's crucial in doing a group spell that everyone is united around the same intent. There are usually not many mixed feelings if you're doing a group spell for clean air, earth, and water, or for good relations and peace on Earth. But this kind of spell is different. Personal fears are triggered by the original situation, and fear cuts off access to both rationality and clear intuition. It can also short-circuit compassion and a larger or deeper worldview. Fear can make

you focus on punishment and revenge more readily than on disarming and healing.

We had to agree on what we were doing, or not do it at all.

This was organic, social, spell-crafting in action. I spoke my thoughts about the need to be willing to use our magic to take a stand. The heart of what we wanted to do was protecting women. This is not revenge, and it is certainly not petty. It's vital and empowering.

After much discussion, we were able to come to an agreement that everyone felt comfortable with, including Lisa. We prioritized our intentions, and decided that the spell would be cast in four cycles or stages.

Our first priority was to stop the attacker. From that moment on, he would not lay a hand on another woman; he would not even come close to harming another woman. Our next intent was to see him brought to justice. In the third cycle, we would send healing energy to the women who had been attacked, including the woman he had murdered. Finally, we would each light one of the dark purple candles I had brought in that night. Each woman would light a candle of commitment, to continue developing and deepening her self-respect and to invoke the sacred protection that deep self-respect engenders. We would conclude the spell by envisioning self-respect spreading to all women, and then to all people everywhere. We would envision women being safe anywhere and everywhere on Earth, in their homes and out. We would offer the energy that had been raised in our circle, in the name of love, to anyone crying out for help and healing, for a sense of connectedness or peace.

We had to agree to an image that we could all be comfortable with for the first part of the spell—stopping the attacker. I had no intention of doing a binding spell with my students. In such a spell, you envision binding the person round and round with unbreakable cord. I believe that binding spells, even binding an enemy, can bind you to that person psychically.

This is not to be confused with the practice that some witches use, of binding a spell to complete it—most simply done by tying seven, nine, or thirteen knots in the final threads of your spell bag, or visualizing tying a cord all around your spell and knotting it in your imagination. Spells are also sealed by the addition of a drop of moon blood, as was discussed earlier.

STOP THE ATTACKER SPELL

We cast the circle, calling in the directions and elements. We smudged with Grandmother Cedar leaves for invoking the power of protection. We crafted a simple spell with more Grandmother Cedar leaves and a clay Goddess figure with a drop of menstrual blood on it, representing women and all life as sacred. We wrote STOP on a piece of paper in big red letters, and put that on the altar too. Here is what we agreed to visualize together:

Red is the color of a woman's power, the color of our lifeblood. We imagined RED STOP SIGNS springing up in a circle around the attacker/murderer in each of the seven directions. When he tried to move, they sprang up all around him—STOP in the East, STOP in the South, STOP in the West, and STOP in the North. STOP from below, STOP from above, and STOP from his very center. We envisioned him being stopped by our stop signs no matter where he tried to turn, so that he couldn't leave the circle.

The second cycle of the spell was focused on seeing the attacker being brought to justice. We asked that he "be brought to justice by his own hand, by his own mistakes, by his own heavy, heavy heart." I got this from reading a spell Z. Budapest (in *The Grandmother of Time*) did to stop a San Francisco rapist. Also, I kept sensing that his heart was heavy with pain, though not necessarily remorse for what he'd done. I knew this might or might not be true; I had no idea of how to be sure. I intuitively felt a heavy heart, and chose to trust my intuition. We're all part of one another, like it or not. We have access to each other when we don't prejudge or project what we will find.

We visualized the man ending up in custody immediately. We didn't need to choose whether he was being found by the police, or turning himself in, or anything else. We only needed to visualize the end result. We imagined it happening right away. *Now*.

Then we turned our attention to the next cycle of the spell. The energy we'd raised in our circle was directed toward the women, whose names we did not know. We sent healing energy from our hearts and minds to the women lying in New York City hospitals, having been beaten unconscious. We offered love, support, and visions of healing on the wings of our united intent—the truth of our caring, our concern, and our outrage at what happened. We gave thanks for the healing we knew would happen—that had, in our minds, already happened. The energy was each of theirs to do with as she wished and needed.

Healing energy has to be offered with an open hand and heart—it has to be given freely. You can't be stubborn and controlling about the form the healing

takes. Sometimes healing happens in death and the process of dying, which is very hard for us to accept. I hoped this wasn't one of those times. The third woman who was brutally attacked had died. We sent our love to her spirit for safe passage, and to her family and friends in their grief.

During the fourth and final stage of our spell, we lit the purple candles, which were a gift from my mother and father, and meditated. We reflected, each in her way, on cultivating our true selves, deep self-respect, and sacred protection. We began to say aloud, putting them into the circle as we spoke them, images and visions of healing, wholeness, respect, protection, and safety —first one woman's voice, and then another, and then many voices sharing visions, creating trance-formations: "Earth's body is sacred space." "Women are the earth." "Our bodies are sacred." "Every woman on the earth is safe to walk anywhere at any hour of the day or night." "Women are powerful." "Women respect themselves, and are respected by everyone as mothers of the creative force." "Women of all sizes, shapes and colors are beautiful." "Every woman is safe and beloved in her own home."

After a few minutes of this, I called out, quietly at first, "The right and ability of each woman to say NO." The last word unexpectedly came out in a long, drawn-out scream. Everything stopped, silent except for the ringing in our ears. The energy in the circle was crackling with shared grief and potent rage. We looked at each other, and then spontaneously joined our voices together in an ear-splitting roar of NO—O—O—O! It was a shattering sound. We were shouting NO to threatening and dominating behaviors, outmoded forms of relationships, continuing violence against women. Rape. Cruelty. Hatred. Fear. We were shattering old structures with the sound of our voices.

Then I added, "The right and ability of any woman, anywhere, to say YES to everything she wants—but doesn't, out of fear." As one, we raised the roof with the word YES, shouting bravely and strongly and passionately, as loudly as we could. What followed afterward was the ringing silence you hear after the clear chime of an exquisite bell. The lingering vibration of that YES echoed within each of us and beyond, touching heart, mind, body, and soul.

After sending the energy of the circle to all beings, offering it out in the name of love, we opened the circle. We released the form we had called into being by thanking Spirit and the Goddess and each of the seven directions, in reverse order of how we'd called them to cast the circle.

Each woman agreed to light her purple candle of self-respect and let it burn all the way down. Dark purple is the color of embodied Spirit, of walking your truth, uniquely and in connection with Spirit. The candle could be lit once more, or regularly and rhythmically, night after night until it had burnt completely down. I would take the simple spell we'd crafted, and bury it as soon as the attacker was caught.

The man was caught two days later, without harming anyone else. He confessed to committing all three crimes. The newspapers reported that his girlfriend had broken up with him and he couldn't get over it—thus his heavy heart? He was caught from a fingerprint—by his own hand?—that he had left on the window of the dry-cleaning store he had never even entered—by his own mistake? (The woman who owned the shop was killed right outside it.) Running away, he jumped over a subway turnstile—a stop sign? For him, it was; he left a matching print on it.

The man was carrying a book called *The Art of Peace* when he was arrested. The detective interrogating him had read the same book on spiritual principles of living. He apparently got the man to realize and feel how far what he had done was from these teachings. The man was convinced enough to write and sign his statement of confession.

Do I think that magic alone caused all this to happen so fast? No. As I've tried to make clear throughout this chapter, magical, energetic work and physical efforts have to work together to achieve results in the tangible world. However, there is no question in my mind that Green Witches aided the NYPD on this one.

Stories of Three Spells That Seemed Not to Work

Do all spells work as intended? Of course not, as the following stories illustrate.

THE BINDING SPELL STORY (A SPELL THAT BOOMERANGED)

One of my students did a binding spell, against my advice, to keep her ex-sister-in-law from financially harming her brother in an upcoming legal case. She saw the woman as greedy, and magically bound her. On the day of the hearing, my student was supposed to take an early bus to get to the city where

the case was being heard, and found she couldn't move—literally. She couldn't get up to leave her apartment and catch the bus! That is an unusually direct and powerful rebound; fortunately, it only lasted long enough to keep her from going where she wanted to go.

I believe that something like that is a wake-up call from the Goddess (whatever you call her). It was a call to re-examine her motives very carefully, which she did. She struggled with it because, though the experience had definitely gotten her full attention, she still felt justified in what she had wanted to do.

Getting involved magically in other people's romantic estrangements and financial entanglements is generally not a great idea, especially if you are emotionally involved with either or both people. There are exceptions; if someone is in danger, for instance, getting involved may be called for. Each situation is unique and has to be evaluated on its own terms. There's no list of magic rules that tell you what to do and what not to do in any given situation. Magic, just like life, calls you to be alive and to perceive your truth in each moment. You know when something you're doing is right and when it isn't, when you're being true to yourself and when you're not. You may tell yourself a cover story (we usually do) but inside, you know.

We are taught to think in terms of receiving "warnings" from God about whether we have been bad or good. Primarily, we've been taught to perceive divinity as a punitive father. Wake-up calls are not exactly warnings. Though we may fear that the Universe is against us or, at best, is neutral and utterly indifferent, if the Universe is comprised of a loving force—if divinity is for us rather than against us—wake-up calls are there to help us grow, to wake us up to our true nature. These difficult teachings help mature us, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. If we receive them with gratitude, they can help us become joyful and free.

TRICKY BUSINESS: (WHO'S FOOLING WHOM?)

It took me a long time to learn why this particular, seemingly perfect, spell didn't work.

Carlotta (not her real name) came to me with the following story: Two years earlier, she had been roughed-up and bodily thrown out of a bar because she'd walked into the wrong place at the wrong time. There was some kind of

argument in progress, and the bouncer was in a lousy mood. She entered and asked a question, and the next thing she knew, he threw her out bodily.

She was hurt, her leg particularly badly. She had to wear a brace for a long time, and was in pain to that day. She hadn't filed a lawsuit because she was uncomfortable with lawyers and the legal system. The expense, and her own distaste for too much focus on money, had also held her back. She had mixed feelings about having money, and judged acquiring money as an end in itself as almost immoral—"even though I know I could do good things with it," she said several times, more to herself than to me.

She told me that she was still angry about what had happened. I replied that she obviously had a right to restitution, and that I could also understand her hesitation to jump on the lawsuit bandwagon. If anything in our contemporary culture is circuslike—and more and more things are—it is the craze for suing. But she was finally convinced that she was foolish not to claim financial amends. She had a lawyer who would only get paid if they won. It was a clear-cut case with witnesses, and he was confident.

The hitch was that the bar didn't have the right kind of insurance, and they were filing for bankruptcy to avoid being held accountable. She felt the time was right, and that a little magical push over the hump could mean the difference between now and never. "I want you to help me," she said. The lawyer was expecting to get her between $100,000 and $250,000, and she offered to pay me ten percent of her eventual settlement.

I told her it would be enough to simply pay me for my time and work, but she insisted. I told her again that it was inappropriate and unnecessary. She told me that she'd thought it all through, and this was how she wanted to do it. I thought about it, and didn't see any harm in it. I started to get excited about the possibility of getting a nice chunk of money for doing good work. The idea of helping her stand up for herself and invoke justice had appealed to me from the beginning. I agreed to help her, and so we set about making our plans.

WINNING IN COURT SPELL

We got together soon after that meeting, when the moon was waning and in Libra, the sign of justice.

I wanted Carlotta to take as much direct responsibility for the spell as possible. She brought the altar items we'd decided on: four white votives for the directional candles, three brown candles to resolve the court case, and a copy of the legal documents. She had written a rough draft of the lines we would speak aloud together to cast our spell.

We worked on the invocation until we were completely comfortable with the wording. It was clear, simple, direct, and from the heart, with a positive orientation. Words are powerfully visual. There are no pictures for "not," or "don't," or "no," as in, "they will not get away with this," "I don't get victimized," or "a world with no violence." When you speak words like those, the images you're left with are images of them getting away with it, of victimization, and of violence. Spells must be cast in the affirmative! I helped her turn the words from what I call negative affirmations to positive ones, such as, "Justice will prevail in this situation," "I am reclaiming my power in this situation," and "A world that is safe for all, where people respect one another enough to live in peace."

We smudged each other, called in the directions and elements, and then smudged our altar. We asked that our circle be held in love and guided by justice, and we gave thanks for our petition being answered. We knew we would be heard, and we were grateful. We called to Themis and Maat, the goddesses of justice we had decided to invoke, and asked them to hear our call and provide help.

Together we lit the central brown candle and chanted our spell nine times, to bring the matter to completion by the next new moon. We each lit our own brown candle, and all three burned hot and bright on the windowsill in the room I had designated as the moon room in my apartment. Moonlight from the waning crescent shone in from the west. The central candle was on top of the court documents. We meditated, each of us envisioning that exactly what we'd asked for had already happened. We let ourselves feel how we would feel when it had happened, feeling it now, in the present.

When we felt complete, we snuffed out our personal candles and left the central candle burning over the papers. We would leave the circle cast, and open it in the morning. Carlotta would sleep in the moon room that night; the magical energy in there was potent from all the women who had crafted moon bags over the past several years. We'd let that candle burn all the way

down. We would each light our individual candles every night, saying our spell aloud nine times, until we'd finished burning them.

I was full of confidence—this was so straightforward. I knew it would work out, that she'd get her money and her closure. I'd get a big "reward," and justice would be served.

However, none of this happened.

It took what seemed like forever, but three months later a final decision had been handed down, and she hadn't gotten anything. Could they have gotten away with their paper-shuffling? I was truly surprised, and the lawyer was stunned. The judge was likely bribed—but that "should" have been surmountable with our spell. It was a good, strong spell. What had happened?

I examined my motives, wondering if I'd done something untrue. Had I fooled myself, and done it for the money? Had I been overly focused on that, or too attached to it? Had I been egotistical or arrogant, looking to prove my power? Maybe it was her suspicious feelings about anything to do with money. Maybe she really didn't want it, or couldn't accept it, even more than she realized. Something was off.

In fact, when I thought back on it, I realized that there were other moments in the whole process when I'd felt that something was off about the whole thing, when I'd been a little uncomfortable. I was checking in with myself and couldn't find what wasn't "right," so I finally just let it go. Carlotta continued to take classes, and sometimes we'd hang out and have a cup of tea or lunch.

One day, about a year later, she called and asked me to meet her for lunch. She wanted to talk to me about something, and said we needed to be face-to-face. It turned out she'd been enjoying and suffering through a lusty crush on me, and had been infatuated and obsessing about "us" all this time. She wanted to know if the feelings were mutual. She confessed to me that one of the main reasons she'd asked me to do the spell with her was to get to spend more time alone with me. She said that sleeping in my apartment had almost been too much for her.

I had to tell her that I unfortunately didn't return her feelings, but—oh, talk about discovering ulterior motives, private agendas, and the something "off" for which I'd been searching! I later realized I'd been the most puzzled right at the beginning, when she'd insisted on giving me a cut of her settlement. I'd felt a little like I was being bribed, but I didn't know for what. And I'd originally advised her that the best way to achieve her aim would be to do the

spell with the help of all her apprentice-circle sisters. "We can do it the next time we meet," I had said excitedly, but she declined, saying, "No, I really feel more comfortable, and think it would be better, if we did it alone." I didn't really understand her reasoning, but accepted it as her decision.

Her intent and focus had obviously been sharply divided. When she was lighting her candle, she wasn't even really thinking about her court case. Also, I had been tricked, so there was an element of dishonesty within the situation, even though she genuinely did want to be finished with it legally, financially, and emotionally. There were more than enough mixed messages going out to Spirit on this one to keep our spell from working. Don't try to fool the Goddess that way! She will never fall for it. You can't fool Spirit. Magic reveals the truth. I think Carlotta would have had a much better chance of winning her case if she had never done a spell at all.

MARGARET'S SPELL STORY (LET GO, JUST A LITTLE BIT MORE ...)

My friend Margaret, another Green Witch, had trouble finding the perfect apartment. Margaret is extremely magical at manifesting almost anything, and nothing more than homes, so I was surprised, even though she was asking for a lot–invoking a reasonable rent, a very specific block radius on the Upper West Side in Manhattan, and a sunny, outdoor terrace with her own back door.

We talked things over, after a month or two went by with no results from her spell work or her hours spent scouring ads. I asked her if she might be sending out any mixed signals about moving. She admitted that she did have mixed feelings about leaving her apartment. When she was starting to clear stuff out and getting ready to pack, she thought of taking down the beautiful bittersweet wreath that she'd made for her apartment door. She had decided against that, though, and was planning instead to take it with her to her new apartment and hang it on her new front door.

Even as she told me this, and I started to feel suspicious, her left eyebrow slowly arched way up as a look of realization settled in her eyes. I didn't even have to point out that the wreath had been made for this front door, as territorial and protective of her current home.

Margaret saw that she'd been holding on to her old apartment, and not making an opening to receive what she truly wanted. She saw that she would

have to make a fresh, new wreath for her new home when she found it. Trusting the emptiness between letting go of the old and welcoming the new is hard for all of us in different areas. But soon after, she took the wreath down, and we met in Central Park. We walked around till we came to a splendid, sprouting, fallen, hollow willow tree. She broke the old wreath in half, breaking the psychic connection that tied her to her current home, and laid the pieces inside the trunk.

We cast a simple circle to invoke sacred space, burning one leaf of sage, offering the smoke to the directions and elements. We smudged each other, the willow and the wreath. Then Margaret gave her thanks for the wonderful years in her home, and psychically let it go. Now her spell was truly complete; we opened the circle and left.

She soon moved into the wonderful place that is now her home. It was everything she asked for, and more.

Beyond Separation

Ultimately, anything that you invoke in a spell—from a new home to world peace—is a symbol. At the deepest level, whatever you are calling forth, whatever feeling you are seeking, it is already part of you.

Everything is already part of you.

You are here as a human, though, to have a human experience. You have to put things and people and situations that seem to create your feelings outside yourself in order to know yourself as distinct and separate, as a unique being living in the world with your own preferences and desires. Everything has its own intrinsic purpose for being and yet, on another level, everything in your life is here to help you wake up.

When you pull away from direct, magical experiences with other people and other forms of life, you shrink your resources and limit the possibilities. Orchids, bittersweet vine wreaths, willow trees, grasses, shiny stones, furry, four-legged animals, birds' nests, insects, soaring eagles, dolphins, stars, even people at the other end of the political spectrum from you—are all made of the same stuff. Nothing is inanimate, and anything that is part of Life is part of Magic and part of you.

Still, we live with the illusion of separation. Spell work can help you magnetize and attract things and people you want and need in your life. Group spell work that is done in community is an excellent tool for learning to work together for the benefit of all. Most importantly, though, spell work can help you to know your own mind, and find and free your own heart.

You grow and evolve, learning from the results of your magical workings. Anytime you do a spell in a sacred way, you are reclaiming your power, owning your gifts and responsibilities, and recovering your natural Healing Magic.

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5 The sheet music for this chant can be found in the appendix on page 224.

PART SEVEN

Rituals

Knowledge arises from action—to do the thing invites the teaching and explains it.

—Algernon Blackwood

When I was first introduced to magical, Earth-based ritual as part of my herbal apprenticeship, I didn't see its relevance to my life or healing work. I asked, "What's the point? Why do it at all?"

The answer I received intrigued me. I was told that ritual offered a way to enact, and to affect, how things come into being.

Rituals are done to creatively participate in and honor events as sacred. They guide us to mark and remember the meaning of natural, cyclical happenings. They are not necessarily somber or solemn—though they can be, depending on the occasion. Often they are passionate, exciting, and fun celebrations involving music and dance, storytelling and theater, love, and laughter.

Real ritual stimulates an altered state of consciousness in its participants, encouraging everyone to experience the expansive, energetic reality behind the events that make up our lives. Ritual also provides us with reassuringly regular, rhythmic opportunities to celebrate living in our physical world. When you take part in magical rituals, you begin to claim your direct, personal relationship with the elements, with Spirit, with the Universe. Someone may be guiding the ritual, but you need no interpreter, nor a divinely ordained intermediary, to know yourself as part of All-That-Is, or to express yourself to the Powers-That-Be. Participating in personally significant and Earth-honoring rituals is one of the greatest means I know for individual growth and empowerment, healing relations between diverse peoples, and recovering Healing Magic in the world.

In ritual, you are participating in the ongoing story of creation. You are affecting how physical reality takes shape, and how it continues to unfold. There is no point in doing an empty ritual. If it is a hollow husk, a form devoid of feeling or meaning, don't do it. It won't provide the chance for a transformative encounter—an experience of yourself as part of the sacred—which is something real ritual always offers.

Sometimes I hear the word "ritual" as "Rich, you-all!" because that's what ritual feels like to me—something that helps everyone feel abundantly rich. You can savor the true joy and juiciness of life when individuality and community join together in respect and harmony to create a living ritual. I say "living ritual" because rituals are alive and complex, always in motion physically and/or energetically. The best ritual has room for spontaneity because, within a given framework that provides cohesion, everyone creates it

together in the moment. You never know everything that will happen in a ritual; this is what makes it exciting.

Ritual is not supposed to be done like a taped television show, with everything planned and rehearsed, and people working from scripts while other people watch and listen. Ritual is, if anything, more like theater, which is an ancient healing art that engages everyone in the moment. However, ritual is participatory theater—theater of the real. You are in the show, and watching the show. At best, it draws you into being more fully present and engaged than you ever would be as even the most appreciative spectator. That aliveness can begin to spill over into your everyday life if you let it—even more if you actively encourage it. Ritual needs to be done live, so that there is a space in which magic can happen. Magic has a way of showing up when you leave room for it, both in ritual and in life.

In Western patriarchal cultures, words like "sacred" and "ritual" conjure up colorless images of purity and piety barely connected to earthy living. The sacred is seen as removed from, rather than mirrored by, pleasure and pain, menstrual blood, sexuality, and motherhood. In Earth-based magic, the sacred is found in the dark, fertile soil, in the sexual life force, in the cyclical nature of life/death/rebirth, in women's blood mysteries, in the yin/yang of male/female energies, in the living waters of the planet, and in the joy of connecting with all our relations—including our ancestors and the future generations who are as yet unborn. The Goddess reminds us, "Let my worship be in the heart that rejoices. All acts of love and pleasure are my rituals."

Judy Grahn writes in *Blood, Bread and Roses* that "Ritual, from the Sanskrit *r'tu*, means menstrual and sacred. R'tu means any act of magic toward a purpose. R'tu is found in the words 'arithmetic' and 'rhythm.' It is present in the words 'art' and 'theater.' " There are similar, ancient associations in many different languages and cultures. For instance, the Polynesian word *tapua* also means "menstrual" and "sacred." It became *taboo* and *tattoo* in English.

Menstruation was the first human ritual—an event of rhythmic magic aimed at creating, nourishing, and bringing forth new life. Menstruation was once understood as the most visible link pointing to the sacred relationship humanity shares with the cosmos, through the observable connection between a woman's menstrual cycle on the earth and the lunar cycle in the heavens above. This is also how people first learned to count and measure

time. Women created lunar calendars, marking the cycles of time that continue to return, though never repeating themselves exactly.

Enacting how things come into being again and again teaches you how to work with creative energy, and helps you experience how elemental energy becomes matter—how the formless takes form, transforms, and then dissolves into formlessness again. Ritual reveals how ideas expressed can transform and become new realities, how they can birth new ways of being in the world based on trust and respect rather than on fear and control. Many people don't consider all these ramifications; they simply enjoy the celebrations, and that's fine. Nonetheless, magical rituals cannot help but deepen and enhance your experience of being alive.

All of what was said in Part V, "The Medicine Wheel of Magic," and much of what was described in Part VI, "Spells," applies to rituals. Like spells, rituals are done within a sacred circle that is cast in the beginning and is opened—not closed—at the end. The directions and elements are called in. Symbols and metaphors are used. Candles are lit, and herbs are burned for smudging. Meditations and trance journeys are often included. Energy and attention are gathered, heightened, and focused toward a purpose. There is ritual in and around every spell, and a bit of spell within most ritual. So what makes rituals different?

You cast a spell when you want or need something. A ritual is done when it is time to do a ritual, when an event calls for it. Community rituals, such as those that are done to celebrate the year's solstices and equinoxes, perhaps best illustrate the point that timing is often the reason for doing a ritual. (See "Earth Holiday Rituals," below.) Group ritual is done to mark, participate in, and engage the energies of these and other natural events that repeat cyclically, such as the new and full moons. (See "Moon Cycle Rituals," this page.)

There are also once-in-a-lifetime events that call for ritual, as they happen to each person just once per lifetime. Everyday events like birth and death never cease to amaze us with their power to change our lives forever. When a newborn comes here from the world of spirit at what we call birth, we welcome her or him with ceremony or ritual. We do the same at the passing of a beloved one into the world of spirit, which we call death. (See "A Remembrance Ritual," this page.) Joining two lives together can be a once-in-a-lifetime event, or can repeat cyclically, depending on the person or people

involved. (See "Jumping the Broom Rituals," this page, and "Casting the Circle as a Marriage Blessing," this page.)

Doing magical, Earth-based ritual, especially in community, can help you see and experience how the life story of the universe unites with your own life and forms a phenomenally coherent, infinitely layered, and interconnected story. Real ritual helps you see that all the parts fit together.

Finally, there are personal rituals that can be done for your own healing. Timing is important here too: Do personal rituals only when you are ready, because you have to be ripe in order for your own ritual to bear fruit. When you choose the right timing for yourself, and proceed with compassion and self-respect, this kind of ritual is powerfully evocative in the moment, and genuinely effective over time. (See Burying Your Fear Bundle, for example, on this page.)

Earth Holiday Rituals

There are countless national, ethnic, cultural, civic, and religious holidays/holy days that take place around the globe and draw distinct communities together for worship or celebration. These naturally exclude all the people and communities who don't share the same tradition. In that sense, these holidays are tribal.

There are four primary Earth holidays that could draw people of every continent together, while still retaining our unique traditions, if we are creative enough to reincorporate them on a worldwide scale into our modern, cross-cultural, global community. These are the solstices and equinoxes. Solstice means "sun *(sol)* stands still *(stice)*." It refers to the two times a year that the sun appears to stand still. Equinox means "equal *(equi)* nights *(nox)*" and refers to the two times a year when day and night are of equal length and, therefore, when light and dark are poised in perfect balance.

The earth, and consequently everyone living here, revolves around the sun. Just as the moon revolves around the earth and helps unite us all psychically, the sun helps unite us physically. The solar holidays have the power to unite humanity, because whether we meet in small or large groups, in public places or at home with our families, these natural holy days are highly visible, like the sun, and belong to all of us equally.

The Earth Holidays are:

Winter Solstice (on or around December 21), which brings the spark of light in the darkness and relates to conception.

Spring Equinox (on or around March 21), which brings fragile yet powerful newborn beginnings into form, relating to birth.

Summer Solstice (on or around June 21), which brings procreative passion, and abundant growth of flowers and fruits; it relates to sexual maturity.

Fall Equinox (on or around September 21), which brings going-to-seed and gathering of the harvest, and relates to gratefully receiving and sharing the give-away.

There are a total of eight Earth holidays. The other four are called "cross-quarter days," and fall between the equinoxes and solstices. They are: Imbolc (January 31), Beltane (April 30), Lammas (July 31), and Samhain (October 31). The cross-quarters are more complex than the solstices and equinoxes, and I will not be covering them in this book. (You can find more information about cross-quarter days in books by Starhawk, Z. Budapest, Barbara Walker, and on the Internet.) Instead, I will focus on the solstices and equinoxes, which are the most universal and accessible since they relate most obviously to specific natural events linking what we experience in our world with what's happening in the cosmos.

Acknowledging these holidays ritually can help us get real together.

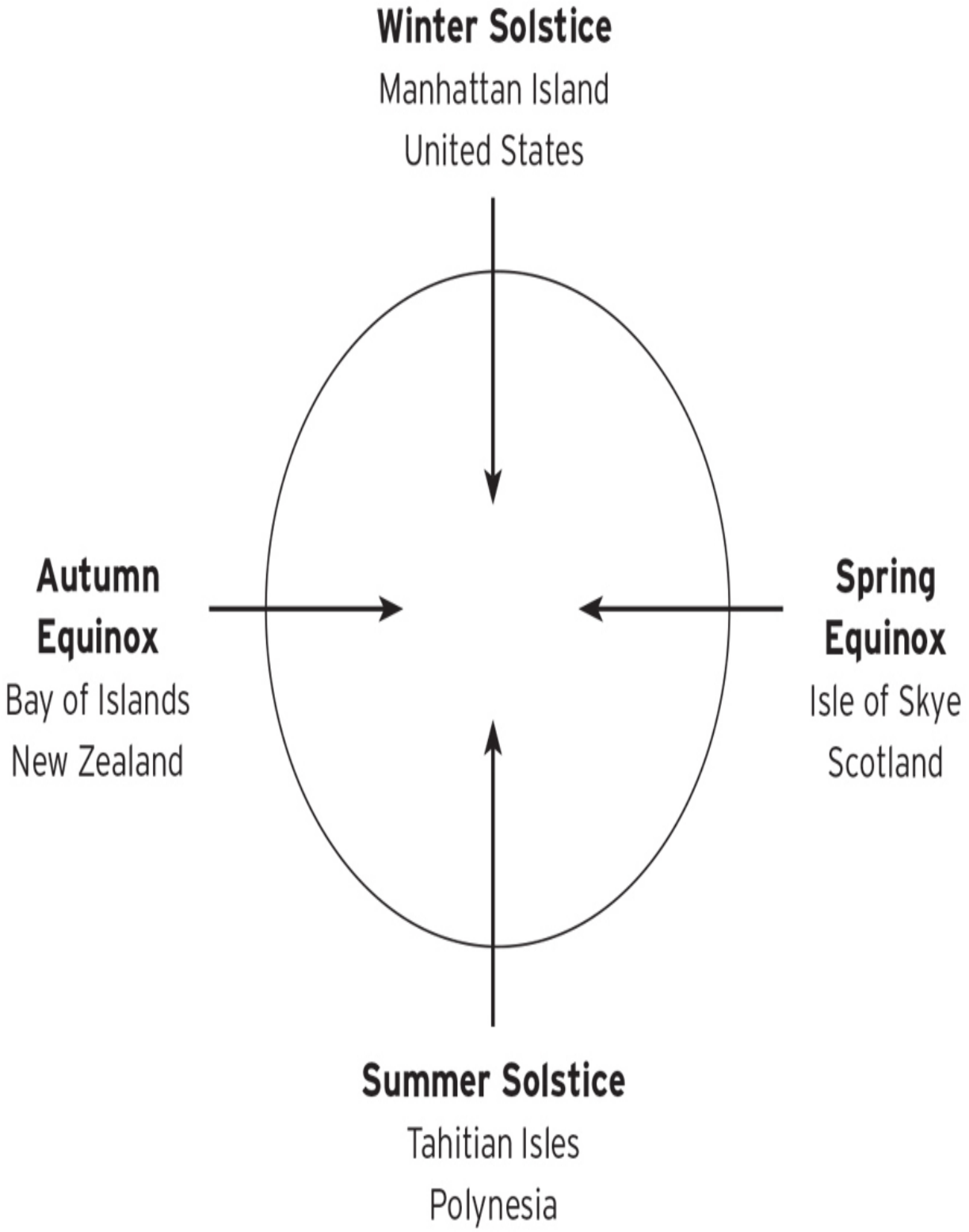
These natural, cyclical events happen at different times in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, mirroring each other across the planet. When it is Winter Solstice in New York, it is Summer Solstice in Tahiti, and vice versa. Yet these events are still unifying, because it is like looking in a mirror across the world, at another face of yourself looking back at you, as in the diagram that follows.

THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

The eight Earth holidays together are called the Wheel of the Year. I was taught that it is our participation that keeps the wheel turning. There has never been a time on Earth when there wasn't somebody, somewhere, marking

the solstices and equinoxes with ritual, so we'll never know; but I suspect that there's a kernel of truth in it.

These times of year are also points of opportunity and power, because they are hinges—transition points where one thing turns into another, as one season turns into another.


Winter Solstice
Manhattan Island
United States
Autumn Equinox
Bay of Islands
New Zealand
Spring Equinox
Isle of Skye
Scotland
Summer Solstice
Tahitian Isles
Polynesia

At **Winter Solstice** (in the north of the wheel), the earth is actually closer to the sun than in summer because of the oval shape of its yearly path. But because of the tilt of the earth's axis, the sun in the Northern Hemisphere appears to be at its lowest point in the sky, underneath the equator at noon, resulting in the shortest day and longest night of the year. Life is conceived in the dark womb of the Great Mother at this time. The roots and seeds of the plants and trees are asleep under the ground, storing their energy, and awaiting rebirth.

Winter Solstice, therefore, is the peak of the power of darkness—an opportunity for resting, dreaming, and conceiving new life.

It is also the celebration of the returning light. After Winter Solstice, the daylight begins to grow a little longer each day.

WINTER SOLSTICE RITUAL SUGGESTIONS

Element: Earth

Colors: Black, red, and white

Smudge herbs: Sandalwood, cinnamon powder, cedar leaves, frankincense, myrrh gum, copal

Herbs for tea: Hawthorn berries, rose hips, or elder berries with pine needles; elder blossoms with roses; ginger with hibiscus and cinnamon

Meditation: Meditate on the gift of rest, deep darkness, quiet time, and sleep. Take the time to reflect, think, feel, and vision.

Personal-growth question: What aspect of myself am I conceiving? What spark of my life am I nurturing within the fertile darkness? How can I help myself be who I came here to be?

Activity: Curl into a fetal shape to meditate, and when you light your candle afterward, light it to remember to nourish and nurture this tender new aspect of yourself that you have conceived.

At **Spring Equinox** (in the east of the wheel), the sun crosses the celestial equator, moving north. The day and night are in perfect equipoise: All over the world on that day, they are of equal length. What was conceived in the darkness of winter is now born. Newborn life is fragile and vulnerable, yet pulses with the vital power of the life force within. The first sprouts are peeking up out of the earth.

Spring Equinox therefore is the peak of the power of birthing creativity into form—an opportunity to increase your energy and outward thrust, so that you birth your dreams into the material world.

After Spring Equinox, the days will be longer than the nights.

SPRING EQUINOX RITUAL SUGGESTIONS

Element: Air

Colors: Lilac, green, pink, pale yellow, and sky-blue

Smudge herbs: Lavender flowers, sweetgrass, sweet white clover

Herbs for tea: Blue violet leaves, oat straw and tops, nettle leaves with spearmint, red clover blossoms, black birch bark and twigs

Meditation: Feed your ageless soul by meditating on your own rebirth.

Personal-growth question: How am I birthing what I conceived at Winter Solstice? What am I rebirthing in myself and in my life?

Activity: Paint Spring Equinox eggs. Eggs are an ancient fertility symbol. Decorate the altar with them. Let the little girl or boy in you come out to play.

At **Summer Solstice** (the south of the wheel), the sun is farthest from the earth; but from the Northern Hemisphere it is at its highest point in the sky, almost directly overhead at noon. This is the longest day and shortest night of the year. Nature is in full bloom. Greens, leaves, flowers, and fruits abound in lush abundance as lovers of all species unite in passion's fiery embrace. Procreation is in the air, fire, water, and earth.

Summer Solstice brings the peak of the power of light—an opportunity to cultivate strength, self-confidence, courage, will, passion, joy, and ecstasy.

It is also the celebration of the returning darkness. After Summer Solstice, the nights now grow a little bit longer each night.

SUMMER SOLSTICE RITUAL SUGGESTIONS Element: Fire

Colors: Red, orange, bright yellow, gold, and purple

Smudge herbs: Sage, sweet yellow clover, copal

Herbs for tea: Elder blossoms and berries, borage leaves and flowers, roses (pink and red), linden blossoms

Meditation: Meditate on self-love. Dream about illuminating, discovering, and opening to receive your heart's true desires.

Personal-growth question: How can I continue to nourish and grow my passion for living, for being fully awake and joyously alive?

Activity: Leap the central cauldron, and/or your personal candle to make sacred summer wishes.

At **Autumn Equinox** (in the west of the wheel), the sun crosses the celestial equator again, this time moving south. Day and night are of equal length once again. Plants reach maturity, final flowers bloom, final fruits ripen, and seeds are ready to share.

Autumn Equinox therefore is the peak of the power of giving thanks for and gathering in the harvest. It is an opportunity to receive and share the year's gifts/teachings/harvest in preparation for the cold, dark time to come.

This is natural, and as it should be. After Autumn Equinox, the nights will become longer than the days. All life will begin to turn inward and die.

AUTUMN EQUINOX RITUAL SUGGESTIONS

Element: Water

Colors: Blue, brown, purple, gold, rust, burgundy, russet, turquoise, and green

Smudge herbs: Grandmother Cedar leaves, sage, cronewort/mugwort

Herbs for tea: Sassafras leaves, cronewort leaves and flowers, *Ginkgo biloba* leaves with hawthorn berries

Meditation: Dream, and send out your gratitude for all you have received this year. Reflect on your personal harvest.

Personal-growth question: What wisdom have I harvested, or am I harvesting, from both the joyful and painful experiences of this year?

Activity: Cook squash, beans, corn, and leafy deep-greens. Share a harvest feast together.

The wheel keeps turning, even in death, until it is time for the spark of life to be rekindled and conceived again at the Winter Solstice. The wheel keeps turning, with our help. Light a personal candle at each holiday ritual, and each time you relight it, after the ritual, reflect on your intentions, commitments, and dreams. Nourish your own cycles of growth and transformation, aided by the cycles of nature.

What if ... four times every year, everyone who wants to live in justice and peace in a sane, healthy, naturally abundant, and magical world, decided to engage in small or large rituals that honor the beautiful Earth through whom we live? What if everyone did rituals that encourage us to consciously guide our own spiritual growth and apply it to our everyday lives?

What if ... people decided to make a statement for life on Earth, regardless of any official, national, or religious stance on the subject? What if each

human being "cast a vote" in favor of life, as an equal member of the tribe of Earth? This could help us immeasurably to grow beyond greed and hatred, beyond our angry illusion that anyone "out there" is unimportant, and not one of "us."

I see this as perhaps similar to calling a temporary holiday truce among all sides during a war, as has been known to happen. It could be a celebratory step in the journey toward world reconciliation—toward, as Bob Marley said, "One Love."

A Dream Ritual Story

I moved my home from downtown to uptown Manhattan in the late 1980s, mostly to be able to walk to Central Park. I had an extremely powerful dream—a healing nightmare—three nights after I arrived in my new apartment.

I dreamt that my mother and I were sitting in the back of a small pickup truck, legs dangling easily over the edge. We were looking out over the land we were leaving behind, not the land we were going toward. We were being slowly driven through unfamiliar land in the northern part of Central Park, going up and down hills, looking for something. I didn't know what we were looking for, but I knew I'd recognize it when we found it.

Suddenly I shouted, "Stop! Stop the truck. I have to get out and sing on this land!" The (unknown, unseen) driver stopped, my mother and I hopped out, and the truck took off. We stood silently for a moment. I turned to her, filled with anguish and despair. I said, "Women have been hurt on this land. Women have been beaten and tortured, sexually assaulted and raped, even sexually mutilated here!" Horrible images roared through my mind. Hideous knowing howled inside my body.

"I have to sing here!" I shouted again. I tried, and at first, almost no voice would come out. I tried again. I felt like I would lose my mind if I couldn't sing. I entwined forearms with my mother, and we clasped our hands together. She was silently supportive.

Gradually, my voice grew stronger and stronger until it was pouring forth like a waterfall cascading down over the land. Then my mother was singing. Then there was a small circle of women singing. Then there were hundreds of women singing—women of every color from every nation. Then thousands of

people were holding hands in ever-expanding, concentric circles. They sang joyously and powerfully, and their singing healed the land and the people.

I woke up knowing that this was a dream that needed to be pursued. There had to be a Sacred Grove within the park. There had to be rituals where people sang on the land to help heal the visible and invisible scars left by past and present violence. Women would take the lead, until everyone was inspired to join hands in community and sing together, and then turn around together and walk in a new direction.

Summer Solstice Ritual Stories

I decided to start by gathering a group of women together to go somewhere beautiful in the city to celebrate the Summer Solstice, outdoors, at night. There were nine women who came that first year. We met in one of the few remaining wild lands of northern Manhattan for an evening ritual in Inwood Park. One of my favorite memories is of all of us descending a hill, coming out of the park after the ritual was over. Everyone was festively dressed, and each woman carried a long-stemmed red rose. Someone held an abalone shell with smudge still burning in it. One or two women held lit candles. I was carrying a hand-carved broom. We were all in good spirits, and filled to overflowing with the afterglow of a good ritual. We had drunk deeply of love, and had offered it from our hearts to all who were open to receive it before opening our circle.

I saw that people hanging out in the street on that beautiful summer night in the city were surprised and even a bit entranced when they saw us, as if they weren't sure what they were seeing was real. I especially noticed a few teenage women looking at us with great wonder. I smiled to them, and we wished people "Happy Summer" as we walked along to our cars, buses, and subway stations. I hoped that we were truly starting/recovering a tradition that would grow and spread and come to include more women as well as children and men. It felt important to go out in an all-women's group, at least the first time. We had challenged our fear of being out in the forested city park at night without any men, and it was good healing medicine, not only for us but for everyone.

That was the beginning, though I later learned that there are folks, like urban shaman Donna Henes, who have been doing these public rituals for years before I got involved.

A year later, I found the location that I had been led to in my dream. I asked police in the park, and found out that it was about two minutes' walk from where "the wilding incident" or "the Central Park jogger incident" had occurred the year before. A white woman out jogging was brutally beaten, raped, and nearly killed, allegedly by a group of young black and Latino boys. (They were convicted, but after almost ten years in jail, new information led to these convictions all being overturned!) The media, predictably, feasted on this story and reacted with relentlessly incendiary, racially divisive, fear-inducing "reporting" that made a terrible tragedy worse for all parties involved. Many women had gathered that year for what turned into a powerfully healing evening, and the Sacred Grove was born. It was created simply to help women take back the basic right to walk in reasonable safety on the earth.

The next year, right before our ritual started, a male photographer from the *New York Times* showed up. That ritual was publicized only by word of mouth, and was for women only. I asked the photographer how he came to be there. He didn't seem to know. He said, "Well, the information was on your answering machine."

"Well," I countered, "how did you happen to call my number?"

He just shook his head, looking a little perplexed. Perhaps the Goddess sent him, and—silly me!—I sent him away without letting him take any pictures. I was still learning, as we all were and are, how to create and hold safe space together, out in the open. I didn't feel confident or comfortable having him there, observing. Also, I didn't think the ritual should be photographed. I was afraid that it would take away from the sacredness of it, from its healing magic. Now I know that there's always a both/and solution when you look for it; I could have let him take before or after pictures. Oh, well—live and learn!

Year after year, on Summer Solstice (and some Spring and Autumn Equinoxes) the rituals took place in all kinds of weather, including two lightning and thunderstorms, and one Spring Equinox celebration in a foot of snow! Women and children and, later, men too have come and joined hands and danced and sung on the land in the Sacred Grove. The location may not

be in the city guidebooks, but it exists nonetheless, and everyone who comes there seems to feel the peace of the place.

It is Summer Solstice as I write this, and rituals are happening all over the city and all over the world. People are gathering in circles to sing and dance, to celebrate being alive, and to turn the Wheel of the Year.

Last night, on Solstice eve, I was priestess in collaboration with a ritual group called Circle of Soul for about seventy-five men, women, and children in a glorious garden in the East Village, in downtown Manhattan. We meditated, asking the summer sun to help illuminate our hearts' desires. Everyone leapt over their candles to make sacred wishes. Leaping over our candles or the cauldron is always a central part of my annual ritual for Summer Solstice. At the end, we held each other's hands in a great circle, and with our individual candles in front of us made one giant group leap for world peace and justice.

My dear father was at a magical ritual for the first time just after he turned seventy-six. As the Circle of Soul folks like to say, "What happens between the worlds can change the world." I say, "It surely helps." My favorite compliment of the night came from a young man who said, "I came here expecting nothing, and I left with so many gifts! Thank you!"

There's something about the magic of living, Earth holiday rituals that touches people of all backgrounds and beliefs. Over the years, as these rituals have taken place, I've introduced many groups to my rendition of the old song, "The Hokey-Pokey." It goes like this:[6]

"The Hocus-Pocus"

You put your whole self in,
You put your whole self out,
You put your whole self in,
And you shake it all about.
You do the Hocus-Pocus,
And turn the world around.
That's what it's all about—oh, yeah!

Summertime is a traditional time for marriage. Late summer (late July/early August) is also one of the traditional times for witch "weddings." Our ritual of

union is called "handfasting," an old word that refers to forming a union between two people by joining hands together (holding fast). In a handfasting ceremony I wrote, the couple joined their lives together in four stages: First, they joined hands in a figure eight, the symbol of eternity, and the priestess bound their wrists in the same pattern with a ceremonial tie, to represent the tie that binds them together. (Getting married is still commonly nicknamed "tying the knot.")

Since "the tie that binds" is love and trust, freely given, no external tie is necessary, and the symbolic tie was removed. It can be untied or cut, depending on personal preference and, if desired, can be held onto as a keepsake. Second, they exchanged vows and rings to publicly declare their deeply committed love for one another. Next, they jumped the broom to symbolize joining their lives together, and their commitment to walk their paths together side-by-side. (Jumping the broom is often a central part of the handfasting ritual—see below.)

Best friends then celebrated them by placing gorgeous homemade wreaths on their heads, and the priestess invited them to share the traditional kiss. Finally, having declared their love and commitment, and having joined their lives together, the couple was invited to jump a cauldron containing the eternal flame of love (a large candle would be fine), to symbolize connecting their personal love with their love for the world, encouraging them to share their love and allow it to nourish their families, friends, and the wider community. This ritual prompted one of the family matriarchs to declare, "I've never seen anything like this! I think everyone should get married this way!" Handfasting can also be kept as sweet and simple as desired.

Jumping the Broom Ritual—Three Variations

Jumping the broom is a traditional, Earth-based ritual of common-law marriage, of joining two lives together in a commitment, whether to a year and a day or a lifetime. This tradition of joining is common not only to Green Witches, but also has roots in Western and Eastern Europe, and in Africa, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. I would be very surprised if it didn't exist as a tradition elsewhere in the world as well.

JUMPING THE BROOM TOGETHER (TRADITIONAL)

Two people join hands and jump across the broom together, jumping as high as they can. When all four feet touch the ground on the other side, they are pronounced "beloved life partners" (or whatever term they choose).

As far as I know, this ritual was traditionally done between men and women, but clearly it can be done by any couple, regardless of their orientation. It is a simple and beautiful ritual that can be embellished or used as is.

Remember that in the closed circle, energy has been called in and contained. It has built up and become magnified. A broom is accessible to anyone, and a "clean sweep" is associated with a fresh start. The broom, laid across the ground in this setting, becomes a threshold. It is, metaphorically, the doorway between here and there, the bridge from the past into the future. When you jump the broom, you cross from the here and now into a new here and now in the future/present.

I dreamed up the next ritual as a solo variation of the traditional ritual. This is a personal healing ritual that is most powerful done in a supportive circle, but it can be done alone if that suits you better.

JUMPING THE BROOM (FIRST VARIATION)

We women jumped the broom on that first magical solstice night in Inwood Park. I had brought a beautiful, simple, hand-carved broom made of hawthorn wood (though any broom would have served), and placed it on the ground near the altar. It was smudged, along with everything on the altar, after we had cast a circle.

Our trance-journey, a little later in the ritual, included an opportunity for each woman to see and remember a part of herself that she had disowned out of fear or shame—some part of herself that she wanted to reclaim and bring back into the light of her daily life, whether it was her sexual self, her courageous self, her angry self, her uncertain self, her athletic self, her intelligence, her art, her appetite, or her joy.

You may wonder why anybody would want to reclaim uncertainty or any other so-called negative aspect. Have you ever felt that you have to look like you know everything all the time? Owning your confusion, and allowing yourself not to know, is liberating. It takes a lot of unrealistic pressure off you.

Also, information can come to you more easily, because you are open to receive it rather than defending yourself against looking foolish. I continue to learn that "I don't know" are three of the greatest words in any language. There are always benefits to aspects we have been taught are unacceptable. This ritual is not a matter of wanting to be something other than what you are; *it is a matter of being ready to reclaim your wholeness, to reunite with more of yourself, in order to be fully alive*.

Burn either cronewort/mugwort or Grandmother Cedar for this ritual. If you do this on Summer Solstice, ask the golden light of the summer sun to warm your heart with love for a place within yourself that you may have turned a cold shoulder to for a long time. You can be psychically helped by the Summer Solstice light to consciously illuminate a shadowy place that you are now ready to see.

Jump the broom when you feel excited and ready to recover that part of yourself. You can shout out what you are reclaiming when you jump, or hold that information silently in the privacy of your own mind. Do whatever feels best to you. Decide ahead of time, if you like, but be open to the moment—that is where you'll find your truth.

I suggest that you choose whether to be verbal or silent when you are starting your run toward the broom, or just before your jump if you are jumping from a standstill. Tell the group beforehand if you want silence; otherwise, when both feet touch the ground, the group can celebrate your new commitment to expressing your wholeness by drumming, rattling, and whooping it up as you land on the other side. After everyone who wants to do so has jumped the broom, share a toast with elder blossom and/or berry champagne.

You can make strong, organic, elder blossom tea by adding one quart of boiling water to one ounce of dried blossoms, and steeping them in an airtight jar or saucepan for one hour. Pour off the liquid, squeezing out the flowers to get the last precious drops of tea. Refrigerate the liquid.

If you like, you can make a jar of elderberry tea exactly the same way, but steep this tea overnight before pouring off the liquid, squeezing out the berries, and refrigerating it. Mix the chilled tea(s) with an equal amount of chilled champagne (or sparkling water for nondrinkers). Delicious!

Elder (see this page) helps you move through the chaos of transformation, trusting the limbo between who you were and who you will become. It can be

scary when you don't yet know who you are growing into and becoming. Elder will help. Toast to all the joyous unions that have been declared on this longest, brightest day of the year.

Keep your commitment alive in your consciousness after the ritual is over by feeding your acceptance of that particular part of yourself in whatever ways you find. Be patient. Be attentive. You will see its expansive and liberating effects in your being and in your life as time passes—not all at once, but gradually. I strongly advise you not to make commitments lightly in ritual. You don't have to be perfect, or become perfect, ever, but you do need to mean what you say. Be sincere, and be realistic. Make a commitment that you really want to keep, not one that is overwhelming even to imagine.

Magic reveals the truth; maybe this is why people both want and fear magic. It will show you where you need to grow, where you don't know yourself as well as you thought you did. Truth, though, leads not only to growth but to joy and freedom. It is well worth it. This ritual is empowering and can be repeated as needed, to renew your "vows" either to partner with parts of yourself that need to grow or to reunite with a missing piece of your soul that's calling out to you, wanting to come home.

JUMPING THE BROOM (SECOND VARIATION—FOR JUMPING SOLO OR TOGETHER, OR FOR AN ADOPTION)

Get an ordinary broom of any size that you like. (If you are more ambitious, you might want to make the broom yourself.) Decorate it with meaningful symbols expressing the passage you're undergoing.

You can carve shapes, use paints, tie ribbons or feathers, glue fabrics, photos, beads, stones, dried flowers, and more. Let your imagination run free. Humor is also a healthy addition to any deeply meaningful, spiritual ritual, especially one that is challenging. Therefore, if any funny symbols occur to you, by all means add them.

This version of the ritual is unique in that crafting the broom itself, whether it's done in one sitting or over a month or two, is clearly as vital a part of the ritual as the jump itself. A person jumping solo might go through a great deal of emotional preparation and psychic clearing as he or she prepares the broom. A couple readying their broom may bond even more deeply by creating it together. Perhaps each will learn things that are important to their

beloved through the symbols he or she chooses—things that might otherwise have taken a long time to find out about a partner or reveal about oneself.

I think this ritual could also be perfect for an individual or couple adopting a child. If the child is old enough to be aware of what is happening, you could use the following ritual as a starting point.

JUMPING THE BROOM AS AN ADOPTION RITUAL

First, you can create the family broom, which is destined to become a family heirloom. When it is ready, gather everyone you love and call a circle of the seven directions and elements. This can be done indoors or out.

Lavender would be a good smudge herb for this ritual, to call in the sweetness of love and the innocence of childhood. When you are all still on one side of the broom you are symbolically not yet a family (even if you are legally). You, or a priestess, or a friend you have chosen, can explain this ritual to your guests. When you jump, holding the child's hand(s), and all your feet have landed on the other side of the broom, you are received by friends, relatives, big smiles, applause, laughter, and hugs. Now it is obvious that you are a family, starting out with love and support from your community. Everyone present can speak words of blessing and encouragement to the new parent(s) and child.

The circle can then be opened, and the ritual is followed with a party.

If you are adopting an infant or baby, alone or with a partner, you could jump the broom while holding the baby. The ritual and celebration party will be mostly for the adults for now, until the little one gets older and sees photos and receives the broom as a special gift.

CASTING A CIRCLE AS A MARRIAGE BLESSING

Here is a beautiful, simple marriage blessing that has worked well for people "tying the knot" who aren't Green Witches, and also for Green Witches or "mixed couples" joining their lives together in the presence of more religiously orthodox family members (whom the couple does not want to offend). As with any ritual, this one can be adapted to the people and place, and can be elaborated upon in any way you desire. It can even be done as part of a conventional wedding ceremony.

The following is written for an outdoor ceremony. A ceremony is a ritual that focuses more on some people present than others. It is their event, and everyone else is sharing in it.

> We are surrounded here by the beauty of nature.
> Please join me now in envisioning all the elements of which we are made as they gather together and form a sacred circle around us.
> (Here you can involve family and friends if you want, by having people ready to follow these cues with appropriate actions.)
>
> This feather is being placed in the east to represent the AIR. May the AIR bless you with clear communication.
>
> These orange, red, and yellow flowers are being placed in the south to represent the FIRE. May the FIRE bless you with warmth and shared passion.
>
> This chalice is being placed in the west to represent the WATER. May the WATER bless you with heartfelt feelings and dreams that you can bring to life together.
>
> This stone is being placed in the north to represent the EARTH. May the EARTH bless you with a fine home on land that you love and tend with care.
>
> This circle is supported from below, as the roots support the trees, as what you know deep within yourselves supports your lives.
>
> This circle is watched over from above by the celestial light of the moon, sun, and stars that guides and protects you both, and that encourages you to share your gifts far and wide.
>
> This circle's CENTER is the love that blesses (name the couple) now and always.

If you won't be placing objects—or even if you are—you might simply want to have someone, or even several people, saying the blessing. The symbolic

objects could be in place before the ceremony, with people instead lighting a candle for each direction, including below, above, and the center of love. The couple can also, of course, pick their own symbolic objects, including symbols for below, above, and the center. The couple may also ask for specific blessings if they wish, such as healthy, happy children.

Rituals such as this are more powerful than words alone. They are certainly more resonant than a stranger's signature on a piece of paper telling you who you are and with whom you belong.

One of my teachers, Emilie Conrad of Continuum, says, "There are two things every human being needs to know: The first is where you are, and the second is to what you are connected."

We live in a time of *pathological disconnection*, and it is truly dangerous. Technology can be used well, but too often it leads to the delusional thinking that we are no longer dependent on the earth. This is not true. Earth is where we are; we live and die here. You can be enjoying a materially abundant, sophisticated, cosmopolitan lifestyle, and be a computer program designer or a brain surgeon, but you are as bound to and as much a part of nature as any land-based peasant. You are simply several steps removed from seeing your direct interdependence—but not paying attention doesn't change the facts. Magical rituals can help you develop that awareness.

The most crucial component for the practice of magic is to pay attention. Be willing to bring yourself back to an attentive, aware state as often and compassionately as possible. Our culture tends to support the opposite state of mind—a state of agitation and distraction, and constant, belittling self-judgment.

No matter how elaborate or simple a "recipe" you use for your ritual, full attention and presence are always the most important ingredients. This gives you more juice, more personal power, making it likelier that you will manifest magic in the everyday world too. It will naturally grow and overflow into your "regular" life.

Remember, we enact rituals because our inner consciousness resonates most directly and deeply with the language of the soul that is spoken in ritual—language that includes drumming, movement, metaphoric magic, music, poetry, symbolic representations and actions, intoxicating aromas, evocative colors, sounds, and silence.

Sound and Silence

It is very hard to write about certain things. It is so different to read about the magic of sound (or movement, or meditative states) than to experience making sounds within a sacred circle. Sports provide our biggest group-sound opportunity (mostly cheers, curses, yells, screams, and bellows) in modern Western cultures. People also sing, in all different styles, in their temples of worship. Sometimes, too, people sing along with the performers at concerts.

Group humming in a ritual becomes interwoven with harmonics and tones, and the current of electricity moving through bones. Humming is one of the most ancient ways of calling in Sacred Spirit, to call in the Goddess. It gathers energy, reaching a natural peak, and then eventually softens, quietly retreating into the spaciousness of silence. Meditations and trance journeys are enhanced by going into the silence—and making sound helps us make that transition. We make sound by singing, drumming, shaking rattles, chanting, toning, or making all kinds of sounds in a free-form jam.

Community singing can be a healing ritual in and of itself. I remember a woman raising her hand on the third night of a weekly class. We had just finished singing; by the third week, almost everyone sang with me when I offered an opening or closing song for our class. She said, "I just have to tell you: When I walked in here the first night and you started singing and expected me to sing with you, I thought you were crazy! I came here to learn about herbal medicine, about natural healing. What did singing have to do with it? I didn't pay for that. But then I realized something—I only drank one glass of wine last week. Normally I have to have a glass of red wine every single night to get myself to relax. It's the singing! It's so relaxing. Thank you!"

More Community Rituals

We need to remember how to conduct simple community rituals in our homes, to bring our friends and families together for important occasions that may require more intimate or even simply additional rites to actually achieve the status of being rites of passage. Most of these fall into the categories of grief (such as those surounding death) or celebration (for births, graduations, and other new beginnings in life). Some will, of course, include both.

A woman I know had an adult son who died suddenly, far from home and under confusing circumstances. She found what solace she could in a formal church service, but many of their friends lived far away and couldn't attend on such short notice. About six months after his death, she returned to the place where they had last lived together. She and her son had a lot of friends there who had known and loved them both, and a couple of her friends offered to hold a gathering at their home. They didn't know exactly what they would do, but they wanted to offer what they could.

A friend of mine who hosted that gathering was feeling very shy, and feared being inept or not centered enough to guide a ritual. She asked for help and guidance, and then also followed her heart and trusted her intuition and her instincts. The first thing she did was change the name of the event from a memorial to a remembrance. Then she called to ask me if I could think of a better word. I told her that quite honestly, I thought she had chosen the perfect word.

A REMEMBRANCE RITUAL

My friend started the remembrance gathering with a party. It was during the winter holiday season, and people relaxed over delicious food and drinks and talked together. This was helpful because it was difficult for everyone to confront why they were there. Normally, you wouldn't have food and drink until after the ritual, but she did the right thing in this circumstance.

She gave her friends time to get their bearings and loosen up a bit, and then gathered everyone into one room, where she lit a sage smudge stick, wafting the fragrant smoke around each person to help them all focus clearly in the here and now. Then she stated the purpose of their gathering.

She welcomed the spirit of the young man they were remembering, honoring, and missing, and asked him to be with them if he could. Her husband showed a film he had created of clips from the young man's life and performances. Next, she invited anyone who wanted to do so to speak.

I asked if she had used a talking stick, but she said no, they hadn't wanted to put anyone "on the spot." I always think of people being given the opportunity to speak, or to hold the group's attention in silence, as a crucial part of a circle ritual. It is not easy for many people to speak in public but, given the opportunity, everyone has something to offer. However, we have to

do what is comfortable and grow into familiarity with ways of being in group ritual settings. It is beneficial not to be too rigid or tied to a formal structure, and to do what works for you and your specific group and situation. She left the talking stick out intentionally, and it worked for them.

After everyone spoke who wanted to and they were wrapping it up, people got a little raucous in an emotional-release kind of way, and started saying, and embellishing upon, how he was always breaking things. At that moment, a little ways off, there was a distinct, loud crash that startled everyone into sudden silence. My friend went in the direction the sound came from, and saw that the purple ashtray she'd put the smudge stick in had "thrown itself off the counter" onto the floor and broken in half. The ashtray had been off to the side, not anywhere near anyone present, with the smudge stick extinguished. His mother had given her friends this beautiful ashtray a long time ago. Everyone present agreed, with varying degrees of goose bumps (truth bumps), that he had let them know, with his own brand of humor, that he was definitely in the house.

Simple group rituals at home can give people a safe setting for emotional bonding and the solace of support. They also offer a place where humor and intimate miracles can occur ... and inner strength can be found.

MEMORIAL BUNDLE

Here is a recipe for an herbal memorial bundle. Put together equal parts of:

Grandmother Cedar leaves—for strength and safe passage

White Sage leaves—for clarity and wisdom

Lavender flowers—for soothing sweetness and serenity

This bundle can be put into a muslin bag, or wrapped and tied in a piece of cloth of the person's favorite color. If you don't know his or her favorite color, use white, black, or red material. The bundle can be buried or burned with the body, or burned by you, to help aid the soul's journey from the physical world into the world of spirit.

As always, it's fine to keep it very simple. A dear student of mine lost her father recently. She comes from a strict Catholic family, and though they fought with her about it, she put one sage leaf into her father's coffin. She will

burn some sage when she misses her father and wants to talk with him. She knows this will help her more easily connect with his spirit.

STORY OF A REMEMBRANCE RITUAL FOR MY MOTHER

As I write these words, it is the first anniversary of the day my beloved mom, Judy Bennett, passed into Spirit. My father wanted to have a ceremony that would be like an unveiling—the Jewish custom and ritual of dedicating the gravestone marker to formally conclude mourning. In the United States, an unveiling is typically done after about a year, to mark the *Yahrzeit* (a Yiddish term for the anniversary of the date of death). An unveiling is done not only to honor the memory of a beloved one but to invite the family and closest friends to continue their return to (a forever-changed) life. However, because my mother had an aboveground burial, there was no gravestone to unveil.

My father and I sat down and went through pages of prayers and poems that had been put together by a rabbinical student for an unveiling ceremony. We used what we liked and what served us, and left the rest. For example, my Dad and I rewrote portions of Ecclesiastes so that each and every line had personal meaning for us.

Ultimately, I designed a simple ritual for our family and close friends that was comforting to us and more fitting for my mother than something conventional would have been. It included a bit of Jewish tradition as a starting point, because the familiarity and tradition-imbued authority was comforting to my father. Also, there is real wisdom in the Jewish traditions of mourning; stages and transition times are marked out like a map to guide those who are grieving.

Life, for my mom was about celebration. She truly loved having a party, and it was mostly in that spirit that this remembrance ritual was designed.

We gathered in a semicircle, and I explained that the purpose of the ritual was to comfort ourselves and honor her memory. There were readings, including a beautiful poem that I found with no author's credit, called "We Remember Them." Each line evokes a natural event, such as: "In the buds opening to rebirth in the spring," followed by the phrase, "We remember them." This was perfect for us to say as a group. We went around the circle, each person reading a line aloud. Then, I personalized it by writing a poem that specifically evoked things we knew and loved about my mother. Everyone

again read a line aloud, such as, "In writing, singing, and listening to clever lyrics, we remember her. In bringing a roomful of strangers together to become friends, we remember her."

When it was time for the unveiling, instead of a gravestone, we unveiled our "marker"—a bottle of chilled Perrier-Jouët champagne, with plastic champagne flutes for everyone. There was also a vase full of many vibrant wildflowers I had picked the day before, including orange daylilies, red clover blossoms, yellow rue flowers, yellow hops clover, and lots of white and yellow asters that look exactly like tiny daisies, because my Mom loved daisies best. A delicate, gold lion necklace she wore for years was draped around the neck of the vase. I think the only thing I will need to add to the altar at another remembrance for her will be a chocolate brownie with walnuts. The cloth that veiled the "marker" was a lovely, simple cotton cloth, with a painted Tree of Life design on it.

Then, we went around our circle and, one by one, spontaneously shared memories and words of love. One of my mother's best girlfriends made us smile by speaking of plans they had made (in their fifties) to pick up men later in life when they were in their seventies, by plying them with martinis and cigarettes! Friends who live far away sent these words, "Judy was an angel among us. She had the ability to be a friend to anyone. We will love you forever, plus a day."

Next, my Dad made a toast to my mother, his beloved wife. This was my favorite part, providing the magic moment that always happens when you leave room for it. My father made the toast and was working the cork out of the bottle, facing away from all of us. At the last instant he turned, and the cork flew out of the bottle directly onto the stone high on the opposite wall. It hit a perfect bull's-eye right next to my mother's name. We drank the champagne, "laughing with tears in our eyes," as the Yiddish expression says, at the perfection of that. My brother raised his glass and said, "Mom, there isn't a day goes by that I don't think of you."

We spoke a closing prayer that my father and I had also rewritten. We asked for help in confronting death, and promised to plant a fruiting tree in her name and to let her memory inspire us to love one another, and life, with all our hearts. Then we joined hands in a silent circle for a private moment of remembering.

We opened our circle by squeezing each other's hands—passing what Seneca teacher Twylah Nitsch calls "the hand-squeeze of love" around the circle. We could have passed a kiss—that is a witchy tradition, too, and a sweet way to end a circle.

Finally, we poured the last bit of champagne into the vase of freshly cut flowers, to symbolically share it with my mom and with Mother Earth.

THE RITUAL THAT WAS AND WASN'T

I went to a "ritual" lunch to honor and celebrate one of my dear nieces on the magical occasion of her first menstruation. She was twelve, felt terribly self-conscious, and was hoping to survive the day without any of us causing her to die of embarrassment.

We were eleven women sitting at a long table in a restaurant. The guests ranged in age from an eighteen-year-old to my niece's grandmother. One of her four aunties had brought gifts and flowers. I had brought moon charts and moon meditation tapes as gifts for everyone. I had written a piece to share what coming into her moon time was all about, that invoked both the irreverent and the reverent, the mundane and the sacred.

I was looking forward to passing "Changing Woman" around the table of women as the "talking stick," so that everyone could bless her and share a story or two of their own. Changing Woman is a silver reproduction of an ancient Goddess statue that fits in the palm of your hand. She has graced many of my ritual circles. I had even entertained a fantasy of all of us seating ourselves in order of age, as we sometimes do at women's rituals, with the eldest woman speaking first and the youngest speaking last. We had some space around us, so that if we spoke softly we would have enough privacy.

My niece silently but clearly begged us not to say anything. Well, what were we to do? I talked to her quietly and reminded her that this was only going to happen once. She remained adamant. So I had a choice to make as the resident ritualist—respect her stated desire for us not to say anything about why we were gathered, or push to make it happen in a way that I knew could be rich and healing for everyone involved?

I reminded myself that this day was, first and foremost, *for her*. Not for me; not for the other women (even if on that day she was the honoree on behalf of

the sisterhood of all women). This was still her day, and I wanted her to enjoy it. So I took a deep breath, and let it all go—well, almost all.

I spoke over my niece's head to the young woman on her left. I asked if she was wearing the red string around her wrist, because I'd asked everyone to wear something red to our gathering. She said, "Yes."

I told her that I used to do that every month when I menstruated. "Why?" she asked me, genuinely puzzled.

When I answered, "to reclaim the importance of my moontime" she got a very excited gleam in her eyes. I spoke to her just a bit more, asking if she'd noticed anything special about her dreams when she was menstruating. I said that women are most open and psychic at this time of their month. I knew my niece was listening, even as she squirmed in protest. Later, at home, I quietly slipped her two moon charts, telling her that one was for her and one for her best friend. They could mark them in red on the dates when they were bleeding. She took them with a quick glance when I piqued her interest by telling her that the astrological signs were listed, too.

So I decided to be satisfied with the ritual that wasn't really a ritual. It was still marking, celebrating, and honoring her transition into being a fertile, bleeding woman. All the women who loved her were gathered around her. Each of us was wearing red without saying a word about it, or anything else. We all knew why we were there having lunch together on a Sunday afternoon at a restaurant that just happened to have the word "red" in its name. (By the way, *she* had picked out the restaurant.)

A PERSONAL HEALING RITUAL: BURYING YOUR FEAR BUNDLE

When you feel ready to release a particular fear that you know has been holding you back, this witchy ritual can be very helpful in creating a resonance that stays in your body and consciousness differently than if you just think or talk about letting go of the fear.

There are many ways to choose which fear you want to put into your fear bundle. You may know immediately, based on your intuition or past experiences. You may need to explore what is timely for you, in meditation or on long walks. You may need to work with a good therapist. When you know what you want to put into your Fear Bundle, you are ready to begin. You may

choose to create your bundle all at once, or over days, weeks, or even months—whatever feels appropriate for you.

Steps:

1. Choose what fear goes in the bundle.
2. Craft your Fear Bundle.
3. Choose the length of time that you would like to keep it on your altar as you psychologically prepare yourself for your ritual.
4. Pick out the perfect spot for the burial.
5. Decide who, if anyone, you want with you.
6. Choose your timing (waning moon, Winter Solstice, or new moon, for example).
7. Take your Fear Bundle to the place you have picked out.
8. Smudge with Grandmother Cedar and sage.
9. Cast your circle.
10. Sit quietly, meditating on what you are about to do.
11. Bury your Fear Bundle.
12. Open your circle with gratitude.
13. Leave, and don't look back.

Let your creativity be free-flowing, and let your desire for help in releasing your fear, and gratitude for receiving that help, be more important to you than crafting your bundle "right," or making it perfect or beautiful or ugly enough, or whatever you think a Fear Bundle "should" be. Move beyond your judging mind—the mind that separates you from the heart of your own experiences and perceptions and feelings—into your own direct experience.

You may choose to craft your bag with things you find, things from nature, items you buy, or pictures cut out of magazines. It really doesn't matter. What matters most is the full attention with which you craft or stitch and pack your

bundle. The bundle may be a bag or a box (how about a little coffin?) or whatever symbolically works for you.

All herbs used in bundles are generally dried first. Grandmother herbs are the best. Grandmothers can be even more fiercely protective than mothers!

GRANDMOTHER HERBS TO USE IN A FEAR BUNDLE

Cedar—Any variety of cedar that grows where you live, such as northern white cedar (Thuja), is excellent. I especially like to use the leaves, and also the berries, and perhaps the twigs. Grandmother Cedar is always the first herb I reach for when I want psychic or physical protection.

Cronewort/Mugwort—Use this or whatever Artemisia species grows wild in your region. I mostly use cronewort *(Artemisia vulgaris);* the mature flowering tops including stalks are best, but the leaves are also good anytime except when at their youngest in the early spring. For some bundles, the roots might be used.

Hawthorn (*Crataegus* species)—This tree is exceptional at protection, with her long, sharp thorns that are oddly invisible even when you're looking right at them. Thorns are the strongest part for Fear Bundles, followed by leaves, twigs, berries, and then flowers. You might want to include all the parts; there is a particular power and strength in wholeness.

These three herbs can be combined or used singly. Each is certainly potent enough on its own to help you reclaim your courageous heart/mind/body/soul from this debilitating fear when you are ready to do so.

MORE HERBS TO USE IN A FEAR BUNDLE

I like to put something poisonous into the fear bundle. Fear is so poisonous—this brings that perspective to my consciousness, turning poison into a healing potion, just as most of these plants, used wisely, are also medicine plants.

Poke berries and roots (*Phytolacca americana*)—Poke plants are very common, and are at their most dramatic in the fall when they have thick, hollow, magenta stalks and dark-purple berries. Though poke is often described as a

poisonous plant, poke leaves are edible when properly prepared and poke berries and roots are medicines when used properly; let them be a reminder that you are making a medicine, a potion for your growth. Your fear, which originally grew out of a desire to love and protect yourself, has become a poison by overemphasizing its power over you. It was supposed to be *for* you. Poke's root can be used anytime of year (except when the ground is frozen, if you're digging it). Psychically, Poke is an electrically charged warrior plant that helps you find your own innate strengths. For this reason, it is my favorite "poison" plant ally when confronting limiting fears.

Buttercups (*Ranunculus* species)—Yes, these delicate and lovely little flowers are poisonous! Include these especially if always trying to be nice and lovely is one of the things you do to cover up your fears.

Violet roots (*Viola* species)—This slightly poisonous plant part can be used if your fear has led you to be unreasonably shy and timid.

Skunk Cabbage root (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)—This root, besides being full of acidic crystalline substances that burn your mouth if you taste it raw (so please don't), lives up to its name. Use this if you like, but don't wait too long to bury your bundle! If you are digging your own, you might want to wear gloves when handling it. (I don't, but some people prefer to.) Skunk cabbage's medicine is self-respect. I include this herb for those who have become so diminished by fear that they have stopped respecting themselves. This root will happily help.

Holly (*Ilex* species)—The leaves and berries of this beautiful and toxic (to us) tree bring good, strong male energy. Holly helps you to face fear down. The leaves are completely edged in thorny spines, and the red of the berries speaks a warning to back off.

OTHER INGREDIENTS

Use whatever else you need to symbolize the fear you are releasing with gratitude to Mother Earth, the fear you are ready to stop feeding with your energy and attention. Earth will eat it for you. This is easy for her and doesn't cause her any harm, not even indigestion.

Opportunities will come to you to affirm that the work of freeing yourself of this fear is progressing, whether it has always mysteriously been with you or was acquired from a known incident. Then you will be able to express and be more of who you truly are.

Burying your fear bundle doesn't mean that it was or is wrong to be afraid of whatever it is—rejection, failure, abandonment, men, women, people of races other than your own; war, being raped, making a fool of yourself; your alcoholic, raging parent attacking you as a child; getting old, getting fat, or any fear that's had a constricting or binding effect on your relationships and your creative self-expression, even if it seems trivial to another. Symbolically burying the fear means you are no longer willing to give it power over what you do in your life. Instead, you are reclaiming yourself.

Fear bundles can be very personal. Don't feel you have to tell anyone about it. Only you know. However, having a witness could be what you need. You might have a friend, counselor, teacher, or perhaps a therapist, helping you work through your fears to know what you want to put in your bundle. You might want an ally to silently witness the burial. Maybe you want to say a eulogy.

Whatever you do, once that bundle is buried in the ground, give your thanks, open the circle that you cast before starting, and express your trust that you know this will help you heal. The Earth Mother will help you compost this fear into strength. You will be stronger for having faced the fear and moved through it, and more compassionate than if the fear had never been there at all. Bless it all. Release it. Know it will be done. Don't look back.

Creating Simple, Everyday, Personal Rituals

Some of my favorite rituals are the ones that I make up on the spot. Once I was dusting in my house, and trying to find a way to enjoy it. I turned it into a ritual by deciding that as I dusted my crystals and herb bottles, plants and tabletops, book covers and shelves, I was dusting off old habits that were not really me, habits that were covering up the real me and keeping me from feeling fully vibrant and alive.

Cleaning out the bathtub drain (not my favorite activity), I decided that all the yucky stuff that was being removed represented shame and self-judgment.

It was now my conscious choice to clear it out and see it for what it really was —old debris that did nothing for me except clog up my mind and natural creative flow of expression. It certainly didn't help anyone else either! I could see it for what it was, and I could see that it was no longer attached to me. I was letting it go.

Another time, I was walking in a pretty park and came to an old stone footbridge. I decided that it was my personal, magic bridge to the next step I was looking to take in my life. When I crossed and arrived on the other side, I would no longer be afraid to take that step. I crossed very slowly, and when I reached the other side I decided that I had crossed the Bridge of Self-Confidence and could now proceed with less hesitation.

I decided to turn a simple leap into a lake into a ritual for myself. I wanted to trust life more. I wanted to learn more and more how to jump into my life projects and callings more wholeheartedly. I asked the lake to welcome me wholeheartedly as I worked to overcome my fears. I plunged in, and felt myself embraced and supported by the clear water. I imagined myself being similarly supported by life, no matter whether I fail or succeed at what I work to accomplish.

Once, when somebody said something that played into my worst fears, though I knew better, I couldn't get it out of my mind. I wrote it on a piece of paper. I looked at it. I read it out loud. I acknowledged the part of me that feared it was true. I ripped it up. I flushed it down the toilet, acknowledging it as the (bull)shit that it was. I didn't hate the person who started all this; he was just sharing his own limitations and projecting them onto me. This small ritual simply helped me take back my *knowing*.

All these simple rituals, and thousands more, can be adapted to fit your needs. For instance, I could have burned the paper in the last example. Ritual action is truly more potent than just thinking about things. Ritual brings changes into your body and your inner consciousness, to good and real effect. I have learned to trust change that unfolds gradually, more than dramatic shifts. This kind of personal ritual becomes an initiatory step, a bridge between deciding something and learning to apply that decision on a regular basis in your everyday life. Changes last when they become part of you organically, rather than when you try to force yourself to be something or someone you think you're supposed to be, based on an idea in your head.

RELEASING SHAME RITUAL

In Part I, "Reconnecting with the Earth," there is a ritual called Releasing Grief (this page). This one is so helpful that I wanted to mention it again here. The same ritual can also be helpful for releasing a feeling that paralyzes rather than serves us, which is shame.

Shame can be devastating. Surely there is healthy shame, which is actually remorse. In order for it to be life-enhancing, shame must be appropriately faced, dealt with, understood, and then released. Shame is not healthy when it is held onto for a long time without anything changing. A classic example is a woman (in some instances, a man) who holds onto feeling ashamed for having been incestuously sexually abused. It is as if she holds onto the shame she wishes her abuser (who usually has been shamed too) should feel—the healthy kind of shame that could have prevented what happened from taking place at all.

Another all-too-common example is when someone is shamed simply for being who she is, which in Western society usually means anything other than young, white, financially successful, able-bodied, heterosexual, Christian, and male. But any group is capable of shaming those who do not fit its criteria.

However you have been wrongly shamed, please let it go!

People always ask, "How? How do I do that?" whether they are releasing grief, shame, anger, betrayal, fear, an unhealthy habit, or anything else. The first step is always the same: Decide. Decide to do it even if you're sure you don't know how.

Ritual can then bring your mental/emotional/soulful decision into physical focus through a symbolic act. Create sacred space by calling a circle of the elements and directions. Dig a hole. Pour all that shame into Mother Earth. Don't hold onto it for a moment longer. Speak it, cry it, write it, draw it, sing it, dance it, burn it, pour it out, in whatever way is true for you. Give it over to Earth. She is bigger and stronger and wiser than you are—an expanded, extended part of yourself. Let her receive your give-away with love. She will compost it for you, help it rot and decay in her loving embrace until it becomes fresh, fertile soil in which you can grow beautiful feelings about yourself.

Whenever you feel ready, open your circle, knowing you have crossed the bridge into the future/present, and started down the path of release that you have chosen. Now your job is to draw on that rich soil, and use it to fertilize your self-esteem, your healthy pride, your self-love.

Magic/Spirit works in mysterious ways, and comes in many guises. It can show up as different people (friends, therapists, lovers, or a stranger who says exactly what you need to hear) or unexpected opportunities (a vacation, job, party, workshop, concert, or community project). Trust your innate wholeness. Remember, you are not trying to change yourself. What you are doing is recovering the heart of who you actually are.

Once you truly choose to move beyond what's holding you back, to let go of whatever is keeping you from living fully in the present, the magic that has always been there will seem to suddenly step into your life and offer the help that you need.

Our world has become sadly and violently fragmented, and so have far too many of our citizens. Individual and group rituals can immeasurably accelerate the rebirth of personal and community connectedness and expressions of love in our world. Magical rituals offer a transformative, living form within which we can fit the parts together, heal our sense of isolation and scarcity, and recover our wholeness and generosity.

Magical, Earth-based rituals that celebrate the natural cycles of the cosmos can help us transform and realign the reigning values of our world, and affect the way that life is being lived in it.

We will once again realize—see with "real eyes"—who and what we truly are: oneness in many forms sharing a precious and irreplaceable treasure, the abundant and magical home we call Earth.

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6 The sheet music for this chant can be found in the appendix on page 224.

EPILOGUE

A Final Story

Ten years ago: I am getting ready for bed when I feel drawn to walk down the long hallway to my front door. I try the lock, thinking maybe I had forgotten to turn it, but it is already locked. I wonder what's calling me here. I am tired, and want to go to sleep.

I glance down at the small, carved oak table next to the front door. There is a lovely altar on it that I've created, piece by spontaneous piece. It is made up of small, sacred objects such as crystals, clay and stone sculptures of animals and goddesses, spiral shells, and the like, all placed in a magical circle on an antique lace doily.

A large, Y-shaped witch hazel branch, covered with leaves, is hanging on my front door. I harvested the branch and hung it up as a protective friend months ago. I see it still looks beautiful and feels protective. I love witch hazel trees. They are native to North America, and live mostly in groves. They are joyous, and know how to hold sacred space.

These trees are so magical and uniquely themselves that they bloom in the late autumn and winter. Talk about being a nonconformist! Talk about honoring one's own rhythm and timing—what a great teacher of self-respect! I've found that witch hazel likes to help people find and claim their unique voice, and also to bond with community. What a precious ally (and that's not even touching on her medicinal qualities, or her talent for helping dowsers locate sources of underground water).

I look from the altar objects to the branch and back, wondering what I'm looking for, what I'm doing here. I again consider just going to bed. It's already after 3:00 a.m. Instead, I stand there, just hanging out, until I simply let go. I let myself get lost—not in thought but in some place beyond thought.

I find myself picking up a silver button with a huge Gaia, the awesome Mother Earth goddess, scribed into the metal. I look at it closely, then turn it over and look at the metal loop on the back for sewing the heavy button onto a sweater or jacket. In my mind's eye I see the button hanging on the witch hazel branch, and know that's what I have been drawn here to do. So I do it. I have learned not to get too bothered wondering about the "why" of these things. Sometimes the "why" is revealed, and many times it isn't.

I tie the Gaia button onto the branch with a brightly colored ribbon, thinking about the woman who gave me this gift, and hoping she's well. It takes a while to get it exactly how I want it, but when I do, I step back and examine the result. I think to myself that the goddess was a lot more visible as part of the altar on the lace, and consider rearranging it again, but I don't. I feel that the button is right where it needs to be, nestled inside the protective aura of the witch hazel leaves. It doesn't look like much, but it feels right. Trusting that, I go to bed.

Down and across town, the woman who gave me the goddess button was ending a late night shift at the restaurant/bar where she worked. She took a cab home to her apartment complex, which was made up of numerous walkways, paths, roads, buildings, entrances, and exits. The taxicab drove away, and as my friend was heading to her door, a man attacked her. She fought him off. She ran, yelling for help, and managed to get inside her building. The door automatically locked behind her. She was still calling for help as the man ran away.

Later that night she described what had happened, and her would-be assailant, to the police. They strongly suspected that he was the serial rapist they had been trying, unsuccessfully, to catch for months. He had attacked and raped three women that they knew of in that complex alone. She was the first woman to have gotten away from him safely.

When we put our two stories together, we were astounded at their synchronicity. I'd felt compelled to hang the Earth-goddess button that I connected with her onto the witch hazel branch that I associated powerfully with protection—less than an hour before she was attacked.

"Coincidence and sheer luck," some might say.

"She was tough and kept her wits about her," others might say.

"All of the above, and more," I'd say. "*Mystery*"—that's what I say.

Mystery includes the power of Gaia, the living Earth, the magic of her healing plants, like witch hazel, and the sacred strength of a loving sisterhood.

Magical acts, like all acts, have real-life consequences. Life is not comprised of either this or that. It is always both this *and* that. It is All-That-Is. Magic can work through any of us—indeed, that's how it does work, consciously and subconsciously.

Maybe the man, too, whose heart was sealed and locked deep inside himself, was touched in some mysterious way by being in the energy field of that magic. Who's to say what is and isn't possible? Maybe being stopped that night helped open a new door for him. Maybe he sought help, or turned himself in, or found the guidance and support he needed to face the oozing wounds that lead to such heinous acts. He, too, needs to remember and recover the love that he actually is.

In the Wise Woman way, we don't spend too much precious time asking "why," as in, "Why is it this way, as opposed to some other way? Why does it have to be this way?" We ask, "How? How can I make this my ally?" We

compassionately ask, "How can this become beneficial for me, for us, for all living beings, including the future generations?"

There are no definitive answers to these living, complex questions. We may want to put our questions into a box marked "answered," and not have to feel into the truth of each moment—not have to be fully present and alive—but we can't. Life counsels us, as Rainer Maria Rilke advised in *Letters to a Young Poet*, "to be patient to all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves. Live the questions."

We can choose to honor Life in all its magic and mystery. We can decide to value each other, one real person at a time, as the marvelously dissimilar, yet utterly united Earth family that we truly are. We can dedicate ourselves to regaining the true vision of our connectedness, and to living our most creative, generous, and loving dreams.

When you follow through to the places your heart and soul want to lead you, you find yourself traveling down pathways of visible and invisible interconnectedness, being led into the truth and beauty of your true nature, into the spaciousness of being fully alive in the moment, where anything can and does happen.

Healing Magic is the path you can walk, step by step, into the future/present. These are the ways that open you to ecstatic experience—to the joy and freedom that you are, beyond thoughts and feelings, yet including and relishing them, too—beyond differences and similarities, even beyond your separate physical identity, and yet reveling in yourself as a unique human being.

Healing Magic invites us to treasure who we are, and to share the blessings of Earth, to join hands with each other and join hearts with all of life.

I will end this book now with the traditional parting words said at the end of any community ritual. These words are spoken by all present, directly after opening the ritual circle:

> Merry meet,
>
> Merry part, and
>
> Merry meet again.
>
> Merry meet,

Merry part, and
Merry meet again.

Merry meet,
Merry part, and
Merry meet again.

Blessed be.

AFTERWORD

I DIG MY FEET INTO THE COOL AUTUMN EARTH, snuggling them underneath the soft, yielding soil of the garden bed. Standing silently in the "dirt" for a few moments, I feel clean, cleared of trepidation and anxiety. I feel myself relaxing, breathing easier.

As I lift my feet out of the soil they feel silky, not at all what I'd expected. My skin feels renewed and tender, like a baby's. And like a baby I feel a sense of innocence and wonder, a sense of curiosity and openness to life. Simply miraculous! This must be the most accessible mental health care plan imaginable.

I have always had a sense of urgency around writing the foundational tenets of *Healing Magic: A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living* and getting them out into the world. During the years I worked on this book, there were people telling me, "Hurry! You have to hurry up! The world needs this information, this wisdom, and it needs it now!" But as T. S. Eliot said, "Information is different than knowledge, and it has nothing at all to do with wisdom." And as Bertrand Russell said, "One of the symptoms of an approaching nervous breakdown is the belief that one's work is terribly important." He also said, "Every time I talk to a savant I feel quite sure that happiness is no longer a possibility. Yet when I talk with my gardener, I'm convinced of the opposite."

So my sense of urgency is not from a delusion that my words or work are terribly important, or that information offered equals wisdom put into practice—rather, it is from a gardener's perspective. It is from my heightened and deepened sense of how people all over the earth, especially in the industrialized nations, need to put their feet into the dark, rich soil that feeds us in order to create a sense of both mental and physical stability—how people need to plant themselves like trees to feed the undernourished lands of their local communities, to send their roots down and out to touch each other, and to re-foster a sense of the intimate relationships we share whether we express them or not. It comes from my desire to help illuminate an accessible path

leading to a personal experience of spiritual connectedness to the Great Mystery of consciousness, the Web of Life, the oneness that underlies and gives deepest meaning to our otherwise individual lives.

Think of it: Even driving down the street, we follow agreements so as to cooperate and coexist. "I'll stay on one side, and you stay on the other. We'll all drive down the street going this way rather than that way. I'll stop at this kind of intersection, but I'll go first at that kind." When we ignore the rules of cooperation and coexistence on the road, we slam into one another; we hurt, maim, and kill each other. This is what's happening now on the road of life all over the planet—not only with our human brothers and sisters but with our relatives of every species.

We are slowly but surely divesting ourselves of our numbness, and letting the awareness rise within us *en masse* of the devastation our disconnection has wrought in our world. With that awareness awakening, the festering twins called "fear" and "anger" rise stronger and stronger, along with our sense of despair. Upon waking up to the looming financial crisis (something people living in poverty have been experiencing all along) and the potential reality of ecological collapse, there are those who go on the offensive with angry finger-pointing, stating who's to blame and who must be punished. At the same time there is the defensive response, the fearful gnashing of teeth and pulling of hair, the wailing of, "What do we do? We didn't realize what was happening, and it's all too immense. There isn't much we can do, right? It's too late anyway, isn't it?"

The answer is No! It's not too late. There is no more time for waiting, but it's not too late to respond now. The point of power is, always and only, found here in the present moment. So what we can do, and what we must do, is learn how to be here. Not just in our imaginations or meditations, not just in our safe spaces, or in the privacy of our loved ones' arms, but out in the open, here on our Earth. We are all part of the living community of Earthlings, which is made up of millions of smaller communities connected by shared land, air, and water, by blood relations, by shared friendships and passions, and by the vital force that is life itself, the immanent Spirit that lives within us.

The only way to keep things in perspective and get active in bringing Healing Magic to the earth through myriads of possible ecologic and economic solutions, is for each person to practice the greatest magic of all—learning to ground and center in your human body so that you can also open

to the power of Mother Earth to help you heal. Plants and trees, and especially their flowers, are a great help with this. Only the nervous system of the earth is massive and magnificent enough to provide us all a conduit for moving beyond our fear, rage, despair, numbness, and desire to deny and escape—and into the vastness of our shared creative potential. Earth can help us move into the baseline of our being; from there we can access our power to transform the systems we live within into sustainable ones that work with the natural flow of energy. The plants help bring the earth into us. They bring us home to the earth, and home to ourselves in the here and now.

The Healing Magic we need to call forth is natural. It is imprinted in all of nature—including our nature—so we don't need to invent it. To access it, we just need to allow it. And in order to allow it, we need to live more consciously. You know the phrase, "I'm getting there"? Try, "I'm getting *here*." The best way I know to do this is to ground and center yourself, and consciously connect to the physical and energetic systems of our planet.

To stay present will allow you to move through the inevitable crises we face in the coming times. The hope, then, planted in this guidebook, is that you will use the sometimes shockingly simple exercises contained within to guide yourself to ... here. Drinking a cup of basil tea can become a portal into the present. Or leaning against the trunk of a tall elder, such as an old oak or maple tree. Or taking a twenty-minute bath infused with rose-petal tea.

No matter what has happened, is happening, or will happen in the world, we can all engage consciously in this journey with our hearts wide open. As unsustainable systems are imploding and erupting and breaking down around us, we are also sharing a journey of rebirth, of volcanic reconnection and healing. We are becoming a new kind of human. We are consciousness birthing ourselves, and the truth is as exquisite as the appearance looks aw(e)ful. We must stand humbly, grounded in our humanness, part of the Mystery of our unfolding creation.

Healing Magic: A Green Witch Guidebook to Conscious Living, whether presenting a recipe for elderberry-infused champagne or giving practices to illuminate the chakras of your energetic body, is essentially offering you guidance to plant yourself in the soil of our Earth because there you will meet and know your Soul.

When you have that stability and sense of connectedness to the deeper spiritual reality underneath the great drama of the world, you become an

empowered, creative, and effective actor in it, as well as a participant in rewriting and redirecting the play, so that beauty and the sane use of power, if not peace itself, will prevail on Earth.

With Love and Green Blessings,

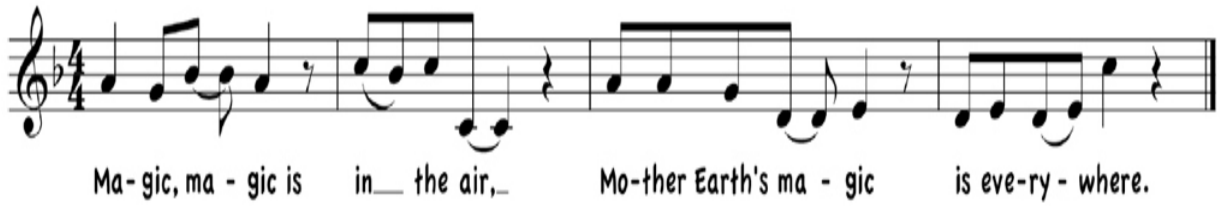
—ROBIN ROSE BENNETT

Bearfort Mountain

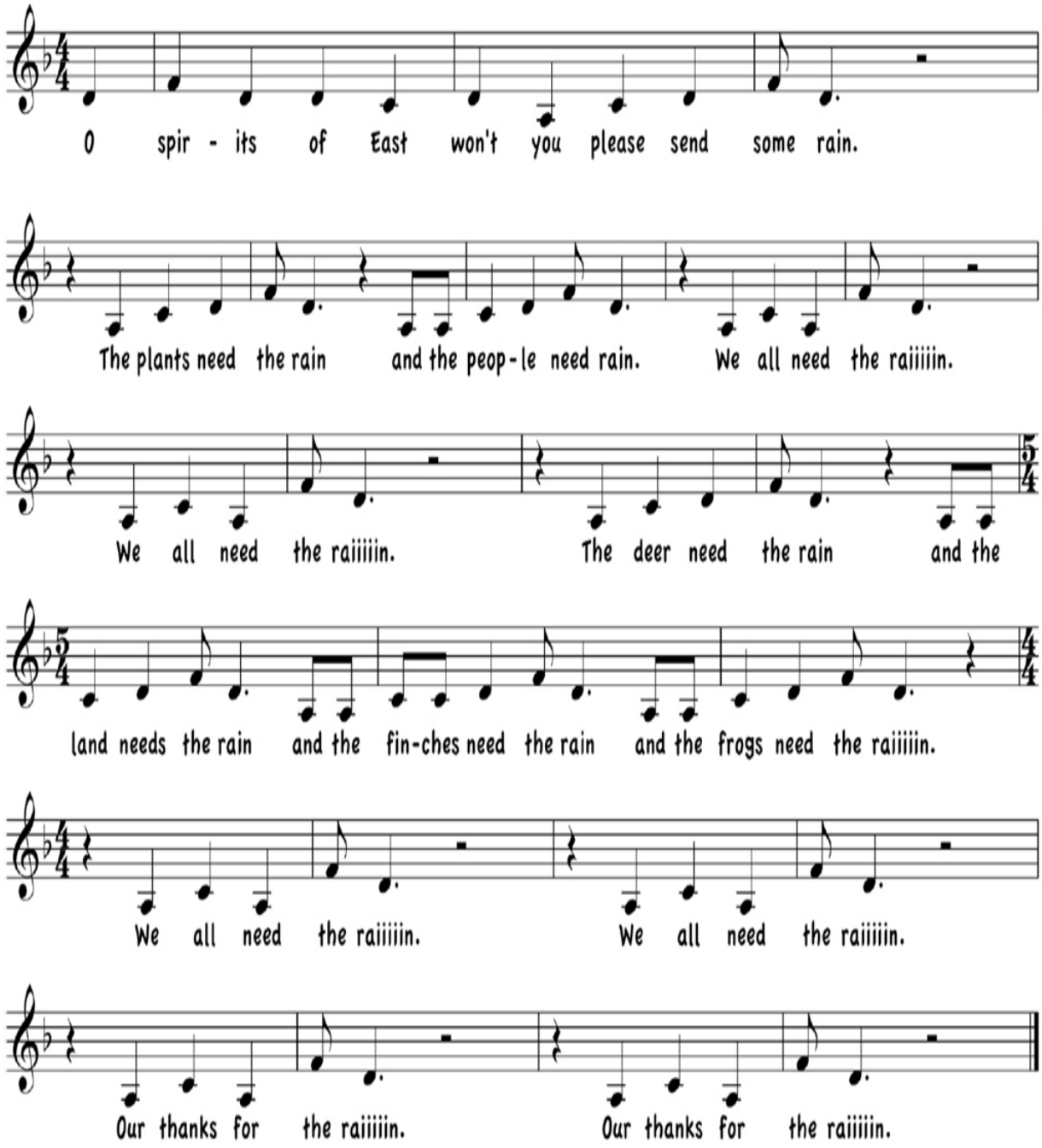
APPENDIX

Sheet Music for Chants in This Book

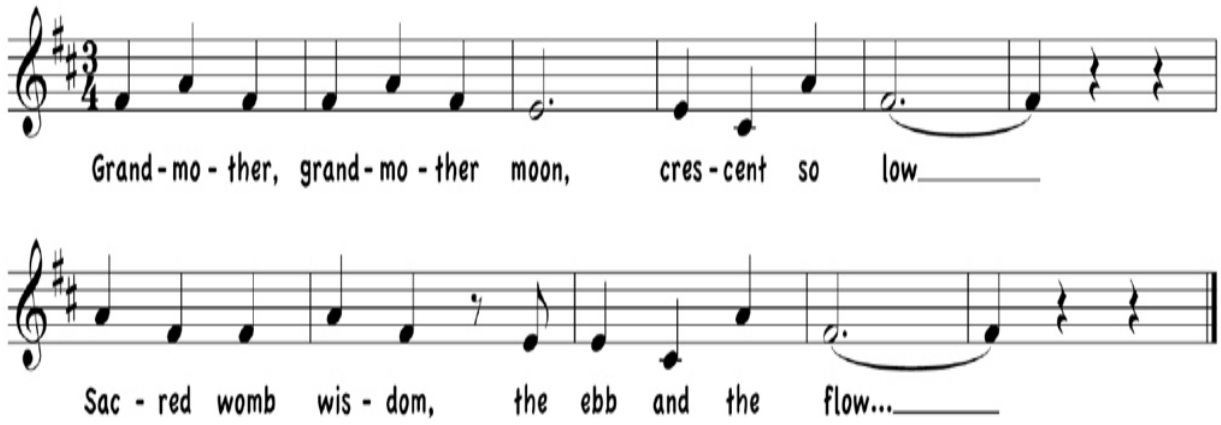
"Magic in the Air"



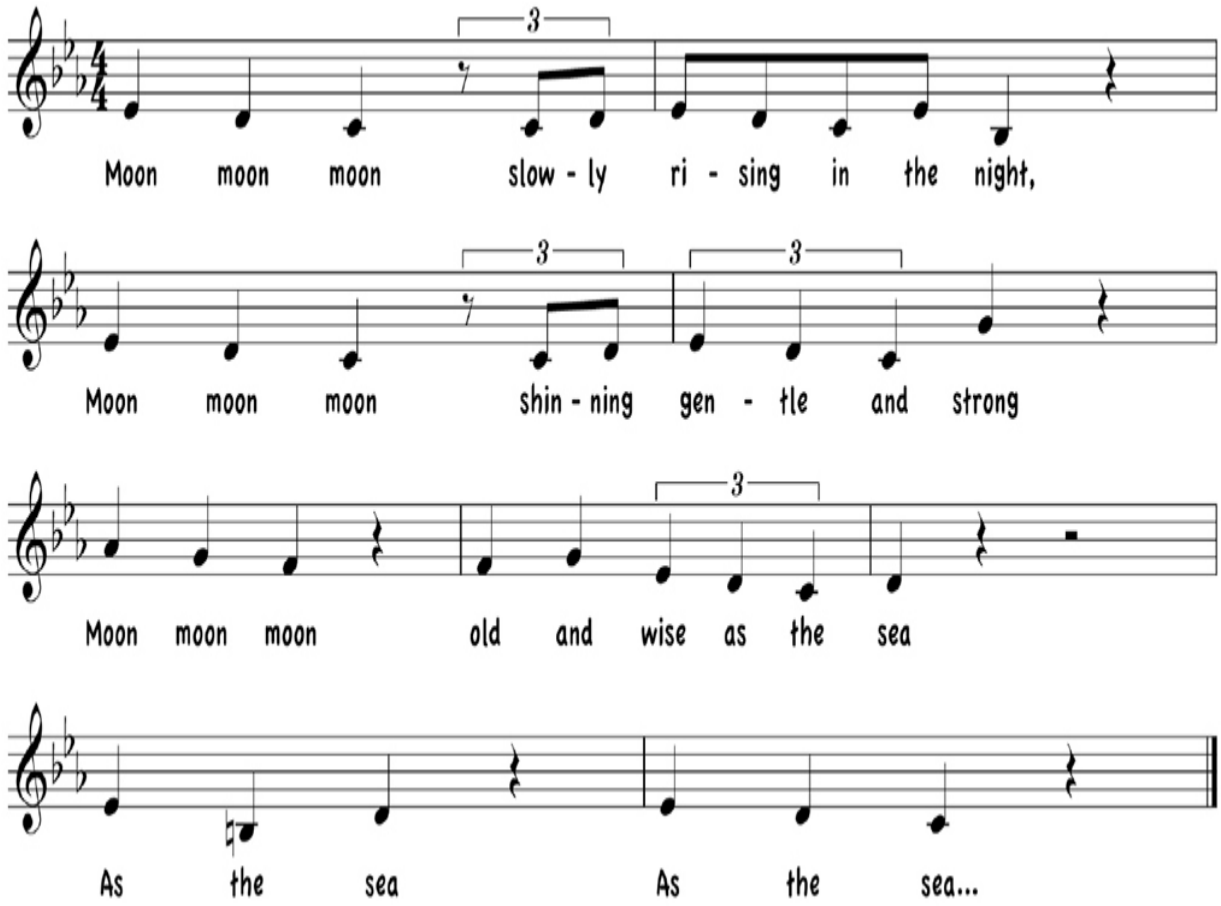
“Rain Song”


O spir - its of East won't you please send some rain.
The plants need the rain and the peop-le need rain. We all need the raiiiiin.
We all need the raiiiiin. The deer need the rain and the
land needs the rain and the fin-ches need the rain and the frogs need the raiiiiin.
We all need the raiiiiin. We all need the raiiiiin.
Our thanks for the raiiiiin. Our thanks for the raiiiiin.

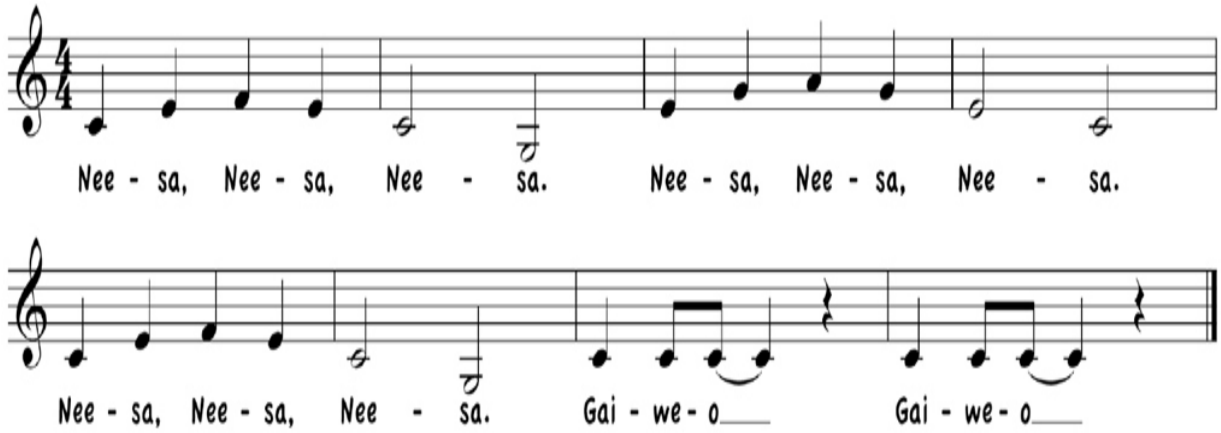
“Grandmother Moon”



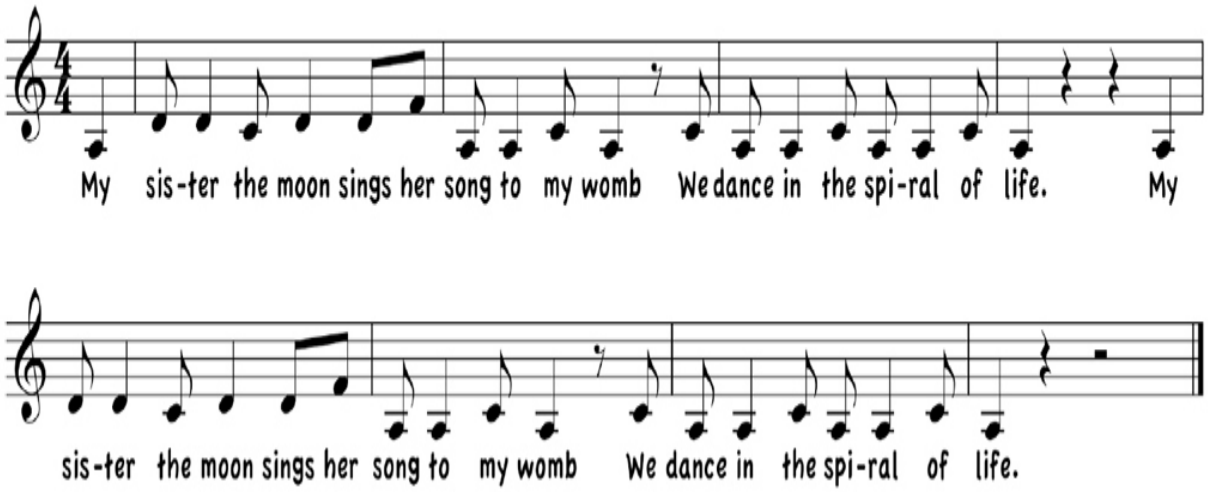
“Moon, Moon, Moon” (from Germany, author unknown)



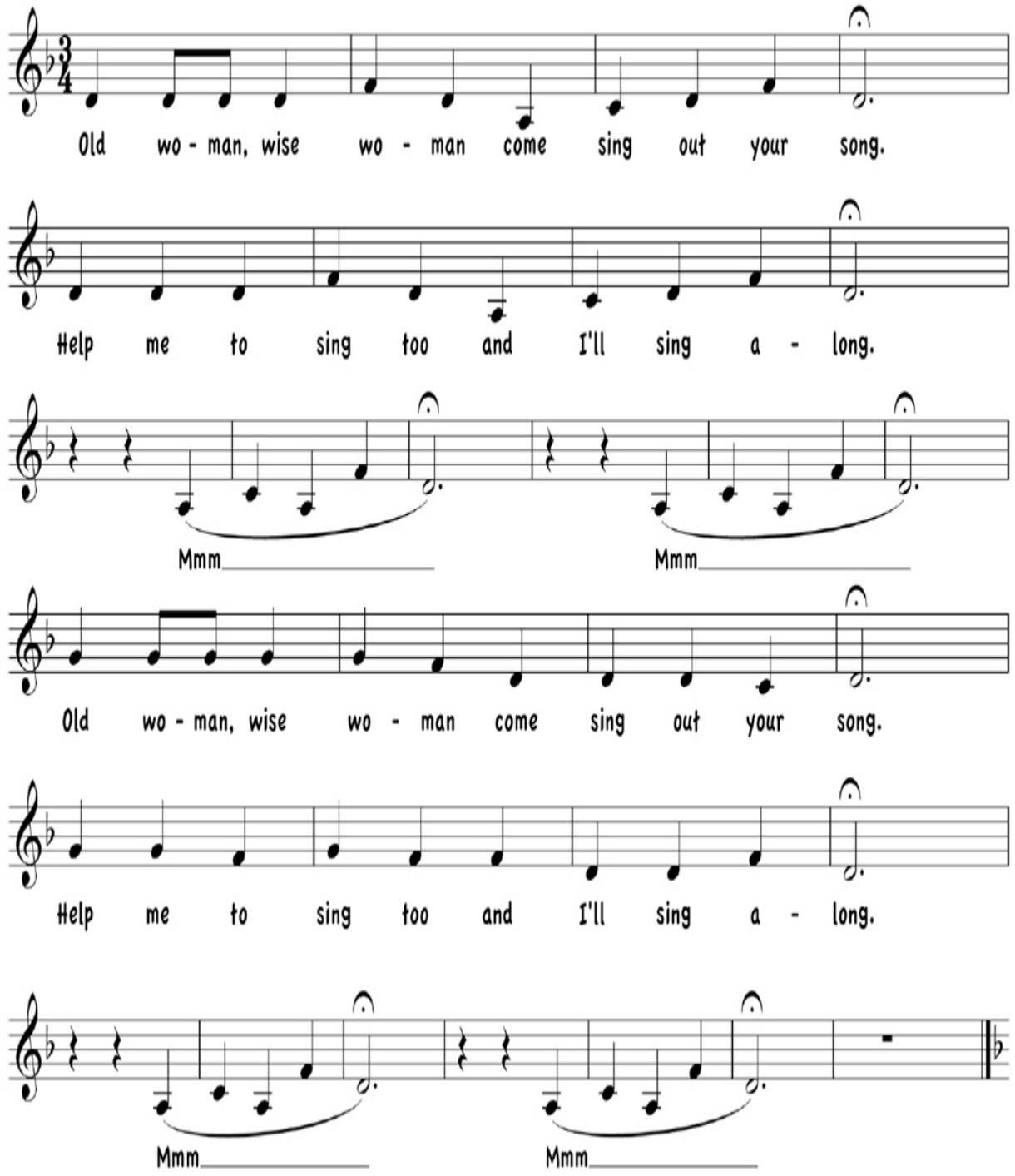
"Neesa, Neesa" (Seneca Song, learned from grandmother Twylah Nitsch. Neesa is translated as "moon, and gai-we-o is akin to "blessed be" or "amen.")



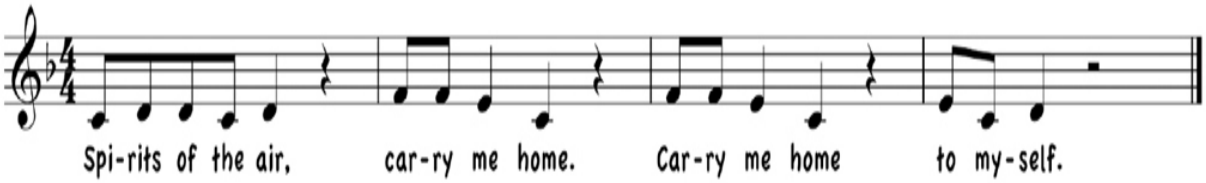
“My Sister, the Moon” (by Spider, from Songs of Bleeding)



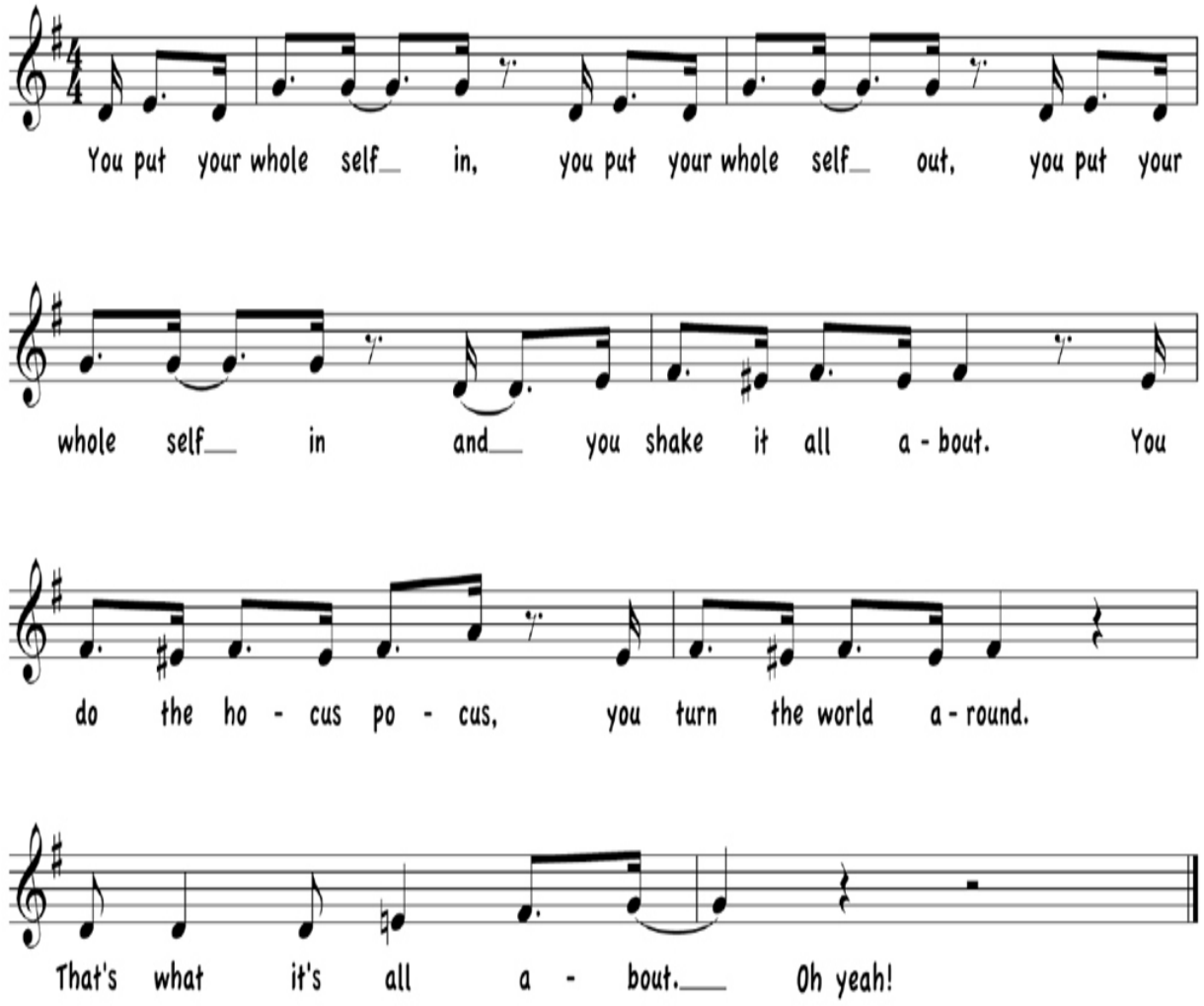
“Old Woman, Wise Woman”



“Spirits of the Air” (Variation from Uplifting the World by Craig and Star Williams)



“The Hocus-Pocus” (adaptation of the Hokey Pokey)



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